



CUSLAR NEWS BRIEFS

COMMITTEE ON U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS
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December 2011

On November 18-20, 2011, CUSLAR Coordinator Tim Shenk represented CUSLAR at the VIII International Gathering of Latin American and Caribbean Labor Organizers, held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Shenk gave a summary of the current economic situation in the United States and learned first-hand the regional trends affecting labor and social movements. The following CUSLAR News Briefs are a synthesis of some of the reports presented at the November gathering.

Organizations call for end to MINUSTAH, UN military occupation of Haiti

Haitian and Brazilian organizations were united in their call to end MINUSTAH, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, and denounced Brazil's role as commanding force of the military occupation.

Didier Dominique of the Haitian organization Batay Ouvriye said MINUSTAH, which was formed in 2004 and is comprised of over 12,500 soldiers and police officers from 50 countries, has played a central role in maintaining Haiti as a source of cheap labor for international corporations, who operate over 40 tax-free factories in Haiti.

In 2008 Janet Sanderson, then US Ambassador to Haiti, presented a similar analysis: "The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti is an indispensable tool in realizing the core US Government policy interests in Haiti," including the suppression of "resurgent populist and anti-market economy political forces," she wrote in a report.

Dominique shared a panorama of working conditions in Haiti held in place by the occupying international force: "Most workers don't get paid enough to eat lunch, so they take a few gulps of

homemade whisky at noon and keep working," he said. "We tried to form three unions this year, to negotiate for better wages. In all three cases, all of the workers were fired within a week and all marches and demands for their reinstatement have fallen on deaf ears."

He stressed that MINUSTAH's presence has been instrumental in repressing peaceful demonstrations and violating Haitians' right to organize.

Haiti: A training ground for Brazilian troops later sent to displace Brazilian poor

Gilberto Antonio Gomez of la Central Sindical e Popular of Brazil noted that in mid-November, reports began surfacing that Brazilians trained by MINUSTAH in Haiti were being used to displace the poor from the "favelas,"

or urban slums, of Brazil's largest cities.

Gomez denounced his government's use of extreme military force, including tanks and helicopters, to subdue and displace millions of poor residents from major cities in preparation for hosting the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics.

Brazil also recently became the first to purchase unmanned military aircraft, or drones, for a police force, when it made a \$350 million deal with the Israeli government in November.

Antonio Barros, of the auto workers union at a Rio de Janeiro-based GM plant, said his union plans to send a delegation to Haiti in early 2012 to examine its role in increasing pressure to end the MINUSTAH occupation.

TAKE ACTION!

- Tell the United Nations the UN stabilization mission in Haiti violates the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and MINUSTAH must be withdrawn: <http://www.un.org/en/contactus/>
- Join one of CUSLAR's working groups for further study and action. Themes: *Root Causes of Immigration, Resource Extraction in the Americas and U.S. Militarism in Economic Crisis.*
- Send us your personal stories or forward articles of interest. CUSLAR's mission has long included being a hub for analysis and synthesis of information about the realities of U.S.-Latin American relations. We need your eyes and ears!

Contact CUSLAR at
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Mexico: Unemployment, militarization, repression

Pedro García, a representative of the General Union of Mexican Workers, shared a perspective on “my country, which is showing all of the characteristics of an advanced capitalist society: extreme inequality, violence and emigration.”

Of 46 million people who are “economically active” in Mexico today, only 16 million have formal employment in the private and public sectors. The other nearly two-thirds of the country’s workforce is either unemployed or engaged in informal work. García explained that this is part of a concerted effort by the Mexican government and international elites to exert downward pressure on wages and undermine remaining union power and create the working conditions

necessary to entice transnational corporations.

As part of this strategy, the Felipe Calderón administration has gone as far as to disband unions outright. García cited as one example the 2010 firing of all 43,000 state electrical workers, an attempt to break up the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME). The SME had been a strong voice for fair working conditions and the respect of human rights in Mexico.

Mexico follows the worldwide trend toward cheaper and more flexible labor, which allows a few to continue to profit despite the current crisis of overproduction.

In the political sphere, García highlighted that President Calderón’s

slogan of “security and combating the drug trade” has meant widespread militarization of the country and repression of progressive movements.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has called Calderón’s position “courageous,” and the US has accelerated its military aid to the Mexican government, to the tune of \$300 million a year in training and equipment. U.S. veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan train Mexican soldiers in desert warfare and urban counterinsurgency.

U.S.-backed militarization in Mexico is paralleled by criminalization of immigrants in the US, as the “arrest, detain, deport” policy for improperly documented migrants has resulted in deportation rates of nearly 400,000 per year under President Barack Obama.

Philippines and Latin America share historical, current struggles

Elmer Labog, Chairperson of Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement), in the Philippines, made clear his country’s common history with Latin America and the Caribbean: until 1898, the Filipino people were ruled by Spanish colonial power, and for the past 113 years, they have suffered the effects of being a *de facto* US colony.

Labog outlined two current major issues facing Filipinos:

- Poverty and unemployment have forced 10 million of the Philippines’ 94 million residents to emigrate through the government’s Labor Export Program. Many sign work contracts that are then cancelled by employers in the U.S. upon the migrants’ arrival, leaving migrants with no legal status and vulnerable to labor violations and human trafficking.

NAFCON, the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns in the US, demands “accountability from the current Philippine administration on the worsening situation for Filipino

workers, particularly migrant workers, seeking an immediate investigation of the employers involved, their labor recruitment operations, as well as due assistance to the trafficked victims themselves.”

- Filipinos are at the front line of the global trend toward “contractual” work: in one case this past September, 2,600 workers were laid off at Philippines Airlines and rehired as “contractors” to do the same job for half the salary. These illegal but government-sanctioned measures exacerbate the need for emigration from Manila, the city with the second-lowest average salaries in the world.

These violations of human rights go hand-in-hand with U.S. policy in the Philippines, as the Pentagon continues to use the country as a strategic military stronghold in the region.

In a November 2011 visit to the Philippines, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pushed the extension of the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement, which requires the Filipino government to supply the 30,000 to 50,000 US troops stationed there with all logistical support needed, including food, ammunition, spare parts and maintenance, transportation, medical attention, port facilities and housing structures.

CUSLAR is a Cornell University based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are a diverse group of people united in our concern about the role of the US in the social, political, and economic affairs of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to self-determination, and support their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and oppression. CUSLAR works for peace, justice and greater mutual understanding in U.S.-Latin American relations through education, solidarity and support of human rights.

CUSLAR is a project of the Center for Transformative Action (formerly CRESP) and is funded by individual donations and courses offered in Ithaca, New York.