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EL SALVADOR

No Posada in El Salvador

President Antonio Saca said “no” to allowing recently released terrorist Luís Posada Carrilles to enter El Salvador from the US.

Saca, in a statement on 14 Apr, said that he would have Posada arrested on charges of falsification of official documents if he entered El Salvador and that “he must be judged because of pending crimes ... our doors are not open.” Saca added, “as a country we are against terrorism and El Salvador will not be a refuge for Mr. Posada Carrilles.” Posada allegedly entered Panama on a false Salvadoran passport in '00.

The 79-year-old Posada, a former resident of El Salvador and CIA operative who took part in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, escaped from a Venezuelan prison in '85, and is accused of many unsavory activities in Latin America during the past several decades.

This includes accusations of blowing up a Cuban airliner, which departed from Caracas, Venezuela, and exploded off the coast of Barbados in '76, killing 73 people. He is also accused of taking part in the infamous Operation Condor and of having a hand in the Iran-Contra scandal. Several countries, including Canada, México, Guatemala and El Salvador, have refused to grant asylum to Posada and are asking for his extradition to Venezuela to be tried for terrorism.

After being arrested in Panama with 200 pounds of explosives in '00, and subsequently being pardoned by then President Mireya Moscoso in '04, Posada sought asylum in the US and was later arrested for entering that country illegally. In Sep '06, a US judge ruled that Posada could not be deported to Venezuela because of the possible threat of torture in that country. He was released from an El Paso, Texas, detention center on 19 Apr after posting bond.

El Salvador is reportedly on a list of seven countries that the US State Department was hoping would take in the aging cold-warrior. On 14 Apr, José Pertierra, the Cuban lawyer representing Venezuela in the case against Posada, told Salvadoran daily *La Prensa Gráfica* that the US was officially asking El Salvador to take in Posada, adding that no country “wanted to handle this hot potato.” However, both the Salvadoran ambassador, René León, and the Salvadoran Minister of Foreign Relations, Francisco Lafnez, spoke to the contrary saying that the US had not officially asked them to do this.

They stated that the request officially would have to come through the office of the US Ambassador to El Salvador.

On 8 May, a Texas federal judge dismissed the illegal immigration charges against Posada due to a manipulation of the translation of his primary testimony. His trial on these charges originally had been scheduled for 11 May. While many in the international community are calling for his extradition to Venezuela, Posada returned to Miami, Florida, to live with his family.

The Greening of El Salvador

On 31 Mar, the powerhouses of ethanol production, the US (the world's main producer) and Brazil (the main exporter), chose El Salvador as the pilot country for a biofuels viability study. US President George W. Bush and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva decided on El Salvador during a second round of meetings at the US presidential retreat Camp David during the final weekend of Mar.

President Antonio Saca announced the news, stating that “this is an ambitious alliance,” and that alternative fuels such as ethanol “will give us the opportunity in the future to have fuel at better prices and address the crisis that the world currently faces with oil prices.”

“This ratifies El Salvador as the best prepared country in the region to develop a platform and be an alternative energy model,” Saca said.

“The US and Brazil are sending a clear message to the world that biofuels are a positive alternative for the environment and will help El Salvador and Central America be less dependant on oil. We're not going to miss this train, because it's the future of the country,” asserted Saca.

Ethanol, which is principally derived from corn or sugar cane, has made headlines recently due to rising oil costs and environmental concerns. The Salvadoran biofuel will be made from sugar cane.

However, not everyone shares President Saca's enthusiasm for the project. The opposition Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) has criticized the plan.

“Antonio Saca's administration lacks a convincing industrialization plan for the sugarcane sector, and is simply parroting Washington's political speech,” argued FMLN leader Salvador Arias.

“The United States is in a state of despair, and its model is based on unlimited consumption—more than 20% of the world's energy—and it has only oil and gas reserves,” he added.

Other critics, such as Cuba's Fidel Castro and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, have echoed the FMLN statements, claiming that the overproduction of corn and sugar cane to meet the energy needs of wealthy countries will deprive poorer countries of much needed agricultural land and foods derived from them.

Answering some of his critics, President Saca stated that his government intends to support and promote more production of red beans and white corn, staples of the Salvadoran diet, and add a program to improve crop seeds. Admonishing Castro and Chávez, Saca quipped that, “To be against ethanol has more to do with the politics of international alignment than of national interests.”

In addition to corn and sugar cane, the biofuel can be made from just about any other fruit or plant waste. As well, El Salvador has recently begun testing the pulp of the coffee berry as the source of an alternative fuel. In much the same way that other products are processed to acquire ethanol, the belief is that the coffee pulp can be processed to obtain the much desired fuel, while ultimately creating a less controversial approach.

The Salvadoran Foundation for the Investigation of Café (PROCAFE), working in conjunction with the University of El Salvador, has used part of a \$250,000 grant from the Inter-American Development Bank to develop biofuels and research this somewhat new idea. The notion of converting coffee pulp into biofuel is not new; such studies were conducted in Colombia and El Salvador about 40 years ago, but have been ignored until this recent push for cleaner energy development in many parts of the globe.

However, as world demand for ethanol increases, or more precisely the US demand, the issue of food security and natural resource protection will have to be addressed as there is already a food shortage in many parts of the country. El Salvador produces bio-diesel from such plants as soy, castor bean and cottonseed. But the push for ethanol as a result of CAFTA, the Caribbean Basin Initiative and pressure from the powerful sugar industry may eventually supplant research into those smaller-scale resources and make sugar cane the only green game in town.

Multi-Nation Gang Summit in Sansonante

On 24-26 Apr, Canada, the US, Mexico and countries of Central America convened for the 3rd International Anti-Gang Conference. Police delegates from each country, the FBI, the CIA and Interpol all held talks in anticipation of better handling the growing problem of gang violence in their respective countries.

The annual meeting, opened by President Saca, was an attempt to update the framework for the seemingly losing battle these countries are waging against international gangs. Extortion, kidnapping and drug smuggling were part of a long list of topics covered during this year's round of talks by more than 200 delegates from Central America, excluding Belize.

During a press conference on the first day of the meetings, National Civil Police director Rodrigo Avila said that one goal of the conference was to find ways for the participant countries to share and coordinate intelligence from within their prison systems, and to "make it possible to manage and detect the movement of the gangs." It has been found that much of the illicit activities of gang members are conducted within prison walls.

Of late, the escalating violence attributed to gangs based in El Salvador and other areas of Central America has garnered much more attention from US authorities due to the presence of international groups, such as the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and their main rival M-18 in California and elsewhere (Vol 26, No. 3). This has even led Antonio Villarigosa, Mayor of Los Angeles (California), to visit El Salvador during the first days of May to hold personal talks with the Saca administration over the growing gang threat and the bi-national nature of the problem in the Los Angeles area.

In addition to the US, according to delegate Sandra Teran (an agent of the Canadian Border Service), some regions of Canada, principally in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the provinces of Alberta and Ontario, have witnessed a recent trend of illegal immigration by Central Americans and an alleged rise in violent crime and illegal drug trafficking as a result. She reported that Canadian

authorities recently deported 69 Salvadoran gang members, 51 of whom were suspected MS-13 members.

Delegates at the meeting were searching for better ways to accelerate the extradition of gang members that flee to other countries in Central America. This included a plan dubbed *Difusión Roja* (Red Web) that will be utilized in conjunction with Interpol. The mechanism of the plan consists of disseminating photographs and other pieces of information about individual gang members to all of the countries that belong to Interpol to better coordinate their resources.

Murder rates in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala have been steadily rising and are largely attributed to gang activities and their ever-broadening connection to international organized crime. Indeed, according to a recent United Nations report, the homicide rate in these three countries is the highest it has been since the civil wars of the '80s and is reaching "epidemic" proportions.

—Jason Howd