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Struggle for justice in Ghana

Adapted from an article by Patrick Bond for Z Net

(Accra, Ghana) The past week offered signs of genuine hope in Ghana.

There has been a regrouping of the country's former revolutionary student/community movement, which is strengthening its political base by addressing two key areas of economic and social strife: the legacy of structural adjustment and water privatization. Promoted as the best means of 'integrating' developing nations into the 'global economy', SA and privatization policies have had the effect of increasing poverty and allowing large business interests to run roughshod over the rights of local peoples.

This would be bad news for a vociferous US ideologue of neoliberalism, Thomas Friedman of the New York Times, who visited Accra in late April and declared that Africans want free markets, penetration by multinational corporations and the Clinton Administration's African Growth and Opportunity Act of 2000 (AGO).

"AGO is not having a positive effect in Ghana," says Charles Abugre, director of the Integrated Social Development Centre. "We see it merely as an instrument for opening Ghana's markets in the name of promoting US investments. For

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Dutch women block NATO compound

On May 23, a group of women from the Volkel Peace Action Camp blocked NATO's Northern Europe headquarters in Brunssum, Netherlands. Six women blocked the entry gates by chaining themselves to the gates of the compound. The women were dressed in purple (the color of resistance). In a statement they declared:

"On this International Women's day for Peace and Disarmament we have blocked NATO, a prime example of a male bullwark. These powerful gentlemen say that they fight for our defense and for human rights, but they only serve moneyed and economic interests. Over the whole world actions are being undertaken by women for peace and disarmament.

"Women's organisations discover more and more how war, or preparations for war, form an obstacle to the development of women and are used to undermine women's rights.

"In their resistance against war, women breach ethnic and religious divides and work on new democratic structures.

"Development" in Mexico, Fox-style

By Darby Hickey, IMC-Boston

Despite the attention paid to the recent talks about the Free Trade Area of the Americas, few seem to have noticed a proposal which would be an ominous precursor to any future free trade agreements in the Western Hemisphere: the Puebla to Panama Plan.

Mexican president Vicente Fox unveiled this Plan, which will encompass the area from the Mexican state of Puebla (south of Mexico City) to the country of Panama, in September 2000.

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They are building a new society where the old one has been destroyed by violence.

"These activities by women do not receive the attention or means that they deserve. Women are usually portrayed as victims of (military) violence, not as its active opponents. On May 24,

attention will be focused on the activities of women around the world against preparations for war and armament. The message is that women don't accept violence as an option for the resolution of conflicts. Women demand a just society that meets human needs, not military/industrial ones."



Photo by Warren Goodwin, IMC Atlanta

Vigil at "School of Assassins"

By Beth Lavoie/IMC Atlanta

(Columbus, Georgia, USA) On Sunday afternoon, May 20th, members of ACCSOA (Atlanta Coalition to Close the SOA) brought puppets to a vigil at the gates of Ft. Benning in Columbus, GA. The vigil was held in support of the 26 defendants who will go to trial next week. The 26 face charges stemming from participation in a civil disobedience action to protest the School of the Americas (SOA) last November. The SOA, which trains Latin American soldiers in combat skills and has produced some of this hemisphere's worst human rights violators, is dubbed by some "the School of Assassins."

During its 54 year history, the US tax supported School of the Americas has trained over 60,000 Latin American troops in combat skills. Countless graduates, upon returning to their home countries, have committed human rights violations against their own people. Even today, SOA graduates continue to appear in reports of current abuses in such countries as El Salvador and Columbia.

"What's happening is so heinous, so diabolical, that I had to stand up for the rights of others. It's my civic responsibility", said Richard John Kinane of Boulder, Colorado. As one of the 26 defendants he is part of a diverse group coming from 12 different states whose ages range from 19 to 88.

If the 26 defendants do prison time they will be added to the current list of nearly 50 opponents of the SOA who have served a combined total of thirty years in federal prison for civil disobedience on Ft. Benning.

Activists brave corporate loggers and arrests to protect old-growth forest

Compiled from various IMC sources

(Mattole forests, California, USA) While treesitters were being cut down from the canopy of Mattole's old growth forest, Kim Damiana and Osprey were found guilty by a Humboldt County Jury for their roles in locking down to a junked car earlier this year, an action that blocked the loggers' access for 130 days.

Osprey accepted a 30 day sentence and two years probation. Damiana refused probation and was sentenced to a 120 days in the Humboldt County Jail.

The Mattole watershed is part of the area known as the Rainbow Ridge Forest. Logging in this area is a particularly destructive because of the number of species that rely on the ancient forests for their habitat. The area also frequently experiences monsoon-like downpours that can cause landslides. Sediment then bleeds downstream into

tributaries that support steelhead trout, Coho and Chinook salmon. It is a rare and magnificent habitat that many argue deserves protection.

The area is owned by a subsidiary of Maxxam Corporation.

There have been 33 arrests since logging began on May 9th; 52 arrests since protests began in November.

A nineteen year-old activist is being charged with eight felony counts of child endangerment and eight misdemeanor counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The Humboldt County Sheriff is alleging that the young adults he brought with him to protest faced "potential bodily harm." The mother of a 17 year-old activist said, "Any danger he was in was from the loggers, the police department and the fish and game department."

The harsh charges and the long jail sentences handed out to non-violent activists have

struck many as excessive, though characteristic of a trend to criminalize activism and defend corporate activities, however destructive they may be. *For more information, visit www.mattoledefense.org*

Mexico

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While advertised by the Mexican government as "a plan for sustainable development...to raise the standard of living for the people of the region," its true purposes have been questioned by many. Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos stated, "Fox's plan...would support those who want to convert the Mexican countryside into a panorama of gas stations, shopping centers and amusement parks."

According to the Mexican government, the Puebla to Panama Plan is being initiated by the Mexican federal government, in cooperation with "the state governments [of south-eastern Mexico], the governments of the seven Central American countries, Mexican business interests, and international financial organizations." Echoing the marketers of other similar programs around the world, the government also states that the Plan's strategy "is based in the idea that economic and social development in the region will result from government actions and policies to stimulate private investment in the area."

The emphasis on infrastructure such as roads and airports, and not other issues such as health, education or human rights, suggests that the true beneficiaries will be the rich.

The World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank, and Mexico's Grupo Pulsar are among prospective partners in the Plan, which is expected to include several different projects aimed at increasing the trans-isthmus transportation capacity. One potential project to construct dry canals in Nicaragua and Mexico's Tehuantepec Isthmus would primarily benefit multinational shipping companies.

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Friedman to argue that AGOA will be the means by which we can penetrate the US market is a delusion. The main effect of AGOA is to link aid to economic reform, [such as] the dismantling of a state's regulatory environment. There are no benefits, and the costs include clear manifestations of deepening structural adjustment and deregulation."

ISODEC and the African Trade Network are campaigning to roll back AGOA. Says Abugre, "We are protesting AGOA in civil society groups across Africa and are placing it on the agenda of the Organisation of African Unity and UN Economic Commission for Africa. AGOA is simply another way of undermining Africa's ability to mobilise domestic resources for development, and of enforcing an anti- developmental trade regime."

Recognizing the threat such policies pose for their own people, Ghana activists also see that it is part of a common struggle taking place across the globe.

Critics of Taliban should consider the racism of Israel

Adapted from an article by J. B. Endres, on IMC Israel

The Taliban, Afghanistan's Islamic fundamentalist rulers, are rightly condemned for an edict under which Hindus must wear a yellow badge on their chest in public. It is reminiscent of the Nazi policy of badges for Jews and other groups. The Taliban had also been criticized earlier this year for its campaign to destroy ancient Buddhist statues. But condemnation is rare of Israel's explicitly racist "national rights" laws barring non-Jews from a number of rights and privileges.

It is shocking that in Israel today everyone must carry an identification card which classifies them as Jew, Muslim, or Christian. Many so-called "nationality rights" are reserved for Jews. Land is reserved exclusively for Jews, who also enjoy preferential access to private and public employment, special educational loans, home mortgages, admission to universities, and other privileges.

All of this is enshrined in Israeli law and has been repeatedly upheld by the Israeli Supreme Court. Of course, these policies are designed to exclude the Palestinians. By any definition, they are explicitly racist, and deserve to be condemned as such. But they pale in comparison to the policies of arbitrary arrest, torture, military attack of civilians, home demolition, and the like that the Palestinians have so long suffered.

The horror of these policies is compounded by the perverse irony that they are enacted by Jews. They are not a fitting legacy to those who survived and perished in the Holocaust.

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