



Environmental Reflections from the Movement of Victims Affected by Climate Change and Corporations (MOVIAC)

In the past days, a World Bank tribunal heard a claim made by Pacific Rim against the State of El Salvador for more than US\$ 300 million, alleging damages resulting from the Government's denying them permission to mine gold and silver in Cabañas. The Company had already invested funds to explore the region for these resources and now they have to leave their potential profits underground. Because the business had permission to explore, they believe they also have the right to extract.

In [the Salvadoran] legal system, permits to explore resources are not linked with those to extract. If the Salvadoran Government grants exploration permits, that does not mean they are obliged to grant exploitation permits - the Government has the right to approve or deny the exploitation permits. Because of this, last February 22 we listened with great satisfaction to Presidential-Candidate Salvador Sánchez Cerén during an event that MOVIAC organized, when he said in front of 2500 of our members that if he becomes President he would prohibit metallic mining in the country. We hope that now President Sánchez Cerén will soon complete this promise.

The act of Pacific Rim filing this claim and the World Bank tribunal's acceptance, means our country's political sovereignty has become an object of deliberation; something totally unacceptable for a country that claims to be independent. It would be terrible if the tribunal decides for [Pacific Rim]; it would mean our country would have to pay more than \$300 million for not violating its own laws. For that reason, El Salvador should immediately renounce the tribunal's jurisdiction. Here is another moral imperative for President Sánchez Cerén - defend our national sovereignty.

In recent days, the United Nations held its Conference on Climate Change. The United Nations will hold a Meeting of the Parties in Peru in a few weeks to discuss this topic. Next year a meeting will be held in Paris for the Heads of State to agree on the reduction of greenhouse emissions, how to finance the process, and transfer of technology. Part of the recent meeting was a march on New York and many other cities of the world where hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets to demand urgent action from the politicians.

The principal cause of climate change is the burning of fossil fuels such as gasoline and diesel, carbon, natural gas, shale, and tar sands, etc. The impacts these are having are felt all over the world, and in some cases the impact has been dramatic, like the hurricane in Myanmar in May 2008 that left 140,000 dead. In our country we have endured heavy flooding and severe drought in recent months, all of which is a consequence of the increased temperatures of the atmosphere a little less than 1 degree Celsius.

Scientists argue that the problem is increasing at an alarming rate, as evidenced by the decade-long melting beginning in 2001 and ending in 2011, which has increased by more than 6 times. During that same period, the average annual snowmelt in Antarctica increased by almost 5 times. If we continue at this rate the temperature will increase 5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, putting the planet in a position where it can only sustain less than a billion people, or 10 percent of the current population.

The main obstacle for resolving climate change is the burning of fossil fuels as the base of our system of production. To complicate the situation, we have an economic system that has a natural and unquestionable premise of permanent economic growth. This is difficult to understand because we have had governments and powerful businessmen with enough vision and intelligence to say that we cannot have permanent economic growth in a finite planet. The problem of climate change cannot be resolved with the current economic policies, and the fight to save humanity is turning into a fight against time.

In recent days we have also heard that the government is signing a FOMELINIO [Millennium Challenge Corporation compact] with the government of the United States in order to invest \$365.2 million in the “development” of the coastal region. There are two problems. First is that in order to access the FOMELIO [grant], the government of El Salvador had to accept demands from the United States Government, like opening the purchase of seeds [for the Family Seed Program] to international suppliers. This means that Monsanto can participate in the supply of seeds, which will result in greater poverty among campesinos, genetic erosion, and contamination from the increased use of agrochemicals. It will also result in a higher rate of deaths caused by renal failure in San Miguel, the Lower Lempa, San Luis Talpa, and other places. And incidentally, Monsanto will not contribute anything to the funeral expenses of these people who will die.

The second problem with FOMELINIO is that it is designed to develop the Coastal region following traditional patterns of resource use and waste disposal, which means that we will have the same problems of environmental and social deterioration that have happened throughout history. In addition, FOMELINIO is designed to strengthen businesses with large amounts of capital. In fact, to access the [FOMELINIO] funds, a business has to contribute \$100,000 [to the proposed project], which closes the list to all small and medium businesses.

Finally, we turn to a transcendental theme of our lives: Water. Human beings are 70% water. To speak of water, is to speak of the lives of all species in the ecosystem. So it is amazing this issue is still under discussion in the Legislative Assembly without any results. It is inconceivable that half of the [Legislative Representatives] do not want to vote on whether water should be a basic human right enshrined in our Constitution. To these [Representatives] we ask, “Have you stopped to think that the life of your sons and daughters depends on water? Do you even care? Do you care more about bags of money than all of our lives? Are you of enough moral character to be a [Representative]? We want to know your response.

These real life examples ought to make us think that we have to resolve the principal dilemma of our age: Should we strengthen our economic system and its dominant corporations, or should we try to save our human species? We must act with honesty, wisdom, and determination. We have to defend our land and life before it is too late.