

June 27, 2006

CENTRAL AMERICA: ìUN-NATURALî DISASTERS, ENVIRONMENTAL RISK MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

In the first month of this yearís hurricane season in the Caribbean, Rights Action distributes an English translation of a message from OFRANEH, the Honduran Fraternal Black Organization, the Garifuna community-based federation we have supported over the years.

Some of their reflections on the various global and local human factors that together contribute to and ultimately provoke the devastating impacts of natural phenomena are included below, as well as at http://es.geocities.com/gestionriesgos_costagarifuna/, where the conclusions of a participatory community forum on the management of environmental risks are posted [in Spanish].

Many communities in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador are still dealing with the aftermath of Beta, Gamma and Stan of last year. Already, the storms and down-pours of the rainy season have caused flooding in various regions of Honduras and have cut off road access to parts of San Marcos, Guatemala.

Beyond emergency humanitarian aid, Rights Action will continue to support our partner communities and organizations in their own initiatives for long-term community development and environmental work. We invite you to consider a long-term partnership between an affected community and your community, organization, church or other group.

To support the work of OFRANEH and other community-based organizations, to participate in a Rights Action coordinated delegation to Guatemala or Honduras, or for more information: info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org.

ìUN-NATURALî DISASTERS, ENVIRONMENTAL RISK MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, By Miriam Miranda, OFRANEH [Honduran Fraternal Black Organization]

For Garifuna communities, the hurricane season in the Caribbean is a period of uncertainty and destruction, during which our population waits for the wrath of nature amidst a complete lack of adequate preparation to confront the rising frequency and intensity of meteorological phenomena.

Global warming has become one of the main threats to the planetís

survival and is one of the determining factors in the increase of tropical storms and hurricanes. The destruction of river basins and watershed areas and the erosion of coastal and maritime ecosystems contribute to the intensification of the effects caused by these kinds of disasters, no longer so "natural."

Some Garifuna communities have not yet recuperated from the destruction provoked by hurricane Beta and tropical storm Gamma last year and in no way have appropriate measures been taken to restrain the deforestation and erosion that have been affecting the Sico, Paulaya, David, Hicaque and Platanero rivers, which caused so much damage in the communities of Walumugu, Tocamacho, Guadalupe, San Antonio and Triunfo de la Cruz.

To date, the respective municipal governments along the Caribbean coast have not shared or socialized any information with Garifuna communities about contingency plans elaborated by COPECO (Permanent Commission on Contingencies). Nor do concrete strategies exist to effectively remedy the deforestation and sedimentation in most of the river basins whose waters flow to the north coast of Honduras.

With the appearance of Alberto, the first hurricane of the season, the communities begin to ask themselves what fate has in store for them during this crucial time of the year and up to what point the State will respond to the situation. Last year, the government response faded into partisan campaigning in the face of the then upcoming elections and the affected communities and families were abandoned and left to fend for themselves.

It is possible that the tragedy of hurricane Katrina in the southern United States and the erratic management by the country's authorities chart the course for the future management of this kind of crisis. We thus begin to experience the stage of the sudden appearance of the environmentally displaced.

Nevertheless, one can begin to discern the militarization of the response to the crises created by disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes, as was suggested this past April 23 in Tegucigalpa, where a meeting was held between the military forces of the continent and aid organizations.

While the military and bureaucrats attempt to design a response, global warming increases with the lack of commitment of the United States, refusing to sign the Kyoto Protocol. On a planetary scale, the continuing unrestrained use of fossil fuels increases the emission of gases, the greenhouse effect and thus global climate change.

The participation of communities in the solution to the problems that arise as consequences of meteorological phenomena is essential. The displacement of communities in the search of a response is a myopic

act, although it appears as though we are already headed in that direction.

The Garifuna communities affected by last year's storms and hurricanes carried out a Forum on the Management of Risks last December 28 in the community of Tocamacho. During the event, community leaders ended up designing a strategy that presents concrete and significant proposals for the management of environmental risks.

Considering the seriousness of the environmental erosion experienced along the coast and the need for the direct participation of communities, we invite you to visit http://es.geocities.com/gestionriesgos_costagarifuna/, where you will find the conclusions [in Spanish, along with other related texts and photos] of the Forum on the management of environmental risks in Garifuna communities.

Miriam Miranda, OFRANEH [Honduran Fraternal Black Organization] La Ceiba, Atlántida, June 19, 2006.

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WHAT TO DO:

- The #1 line of work in favour of global justice and equality, including community-controlled development, protection of the environment, justice and human rights, is to fund and directly support local organizations so that they can continue to lead their own struggles. Please make tax-charitable donations to Rights Action in Canada and the U.S., to help support grassroots organizations in countries where we work (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, Chiapas (Mexico));
- Get involved in education and activism work in your home community concerning the negative impacts of global economic and military power abuse whose policies and actions are controlled by the "G8" governments, including Canada and the U.S.;
- Consider establishing long-term "partnerships" between your community / organization with grassroots organizations / communities in these countries that are affected by the global economic and military policies and actions of the G8 countries;
- Consider coming to these countries on an educational-activist delegation;

Rights Action is a development, enviro- and human rights organization, with its main office in Guatemala. We channel your tax-deductible donations to over 50 community development, environment and human rights organizations in Guatemala, Chiapas, Honduras, El Salvador and

Haiti. We carry out education & activist work in the USA and Canada (and take educational delegations to these countries) to learn about and get involved in good work for global human rights, a healthy environment and a just economic development model.

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to:

* United States:† Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887.

* Canada:† 509 St. Clair Ave W, box73527, Toronto ON, M6C-1C0.

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