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## **MLS Update: Latin America and the Caribbean**

### **LEADING IN THE NEWS**

As the federal government shutdown continues in the U.S., a group of finance ministers, in Washington for a meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, cautioned the U.S. on the effects of a debt default, saying that for the Latin American region the outcome would be “devastating.” The meeting was chaired by Colombian finance minister Mauricio Cardenas.

On October 1, the State Department announced that the U.S. was expelling 3 Venezuelan diplomats in retaliation for the Venezuelan government’s earlier decision to expel 3 American diplomats serving at the U.S. embassy in Caracas, including the Charge de Affairs who is the highest ranking official at the embassy since the former Chavez government expelled the last American ambassador in 2008. The Venezuelan government has accused the 3 Americans of having been involved in efforts to destabilize the country, although this is denied by the State Department.

On October 9, the World Bank issued a report titled “Latin America’s Deceleration and the Exchange Rate Buffer.” The report shows that exchange rates could allow Latin America and the Caribbean to successfully maneuver through a global slowdown. The report also calls on the region to invest in improving structural deficits in education and infrastructure. According to World Bank Chief Economist for Latin America and the Caribbean Augusto de la Torre, the region as a whole will likely continue to grow in 2013, but at a comparably reduced rate of around 2.5%. The report can be found [here](#).

### **UNITED STATES – LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN RELATIONS**

#### **White House**

On September 30, the White House sent several Presidential nominations to the Senate, including: Mark E. Lopes, of Arizona, to be U.S. Executive Director of the Inter-American Development Bank for a term of three years, and Catherine Ann Novelli, of Virginia, to be U.S. Alternate Governor of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for a term of

five years, and U.S. Alternate Governor of the Inter-American Development Bank for a term of five years.

## **Congress**

On October 1, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing to consider S. 812, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to take actions to implement the agreement between the U.S. and Mexico concerning transboundary hydrocarbon reservoirs in the Gulf of Mexico. Witnesses included State Department Special Envoy and Coordinator for International Energy Affairs Carlos Pascual, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management Tommy Beaudreau, Jacqueline Savitz of Oceana, and Erik Milito of the American Petroleum Institute (API).

## **Department of Justice**

On September 30, a federal jury in California began debate on whether or not former Guatemalan soldier Jorge Sosa lied on his application for U.S. citizenship about his military service and suspected involvement in 1982 Dos Erres massacre. After just hours of deliberation, the jury convicted Sosa of lying about his role in the massacre. Sosa could face 15 years in federal prison and lose his U.S. citizenship. Sentencing procedures are scheduled for December 9.

## **State Department**

On October 7, Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns met with U.S. Ambassador-designate to Peru Brian Nichols. The meeting was held at the Department of State.

Over the past week, the State Department has issued Fact Sheets on U.S. Relations with Venezuela, found [here](#); U.S. Relations with El Salvador, found [here](#); U.S. Relations with Brazil, found [here](#); and Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas, found [here](#).

## **Treasury Department**

On September 30, the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced new sanctions against Luis Francisco Vallarta Escalante and Alvaro Padro Pastor, family members of Juan Jose Esparragoza Moreno, leader of Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel. OFAC also announced new sanctions targeting Casa V, a banquet hall in Guadalajara controlled by Padro Pastor. The State Department continues to offer a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to Esparragoza Moreno's arrest or conviction. Mexican authorities are also offering a reward of up to 30 million pesos for information leading to his capture.

## **Organization of American States**

On September 30, the Organization of American States (OAS) hosted the 52<sup>nd</sup> Lecture of the Americas on "Making Migration a Positive Factor for Development in the Americas." OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza noted while Latin America and the Caribbean represent only 8% of the world population, migrants from the region are 16% of total migrants in the world. Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) William Lacy Swing said the Western Hemisphere remains important for international migration, especially with a growing trend of "south-south" migration.

On October 3, Guatemalan Foreign Minister Fernando Carrera sent a letter to OAS Secretary

General José Miguel Insulza protesting statements made by Foreign Minister of Belize Wilfred Erlington at the U.N. During general debate, Minister Erlington suggested Guatemala has forcefully tried to assert rights over territory administered by Belize and noted Guatemala had unilaterally suspended a sovereignty referendum. Since the referendum's suspension, the OAS has mediated dialogue between Guatemala and Belize.

On October 6, the OAS convened a meeting of electoral authorities from Belize and Guatemala to exchange best practices in managing elections and conducting referendums. The Guatemalan delegation was led by President of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal María Eugenia Villagrán de León, while the Belizean delegation was led by President of the Elections and Boundaries Commission Bernard Pitts. As a result of the meeting, the delegations agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation on electoral matters.

## Communications

On October 1, NBC asked all cable television companies operating in Costa Rica, including Cabletica, Tigo, CableVision, Claro TV, and Telecable, to stop broadcasting its signal. As a result, the channel was removed from both analog and digital systems.

On October 2, Honduran telecommunications commission, Conatel, announced Mexican company America Movil and emerging markets telecommunications group Millicom were awarded licenses worth \$12.05 million each to begin offering 4G mobile services in Honduras. The award is conditional on operations commencing within 18 months.

On October 10, Chairman of the Mexican Senate Transport and Communications Committee Javier Lozano said Mexico's reforms in the telecommunications sector will reduce tycoon Carlos Slim's telecommunications market share below 50% before Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto leaves office in 2018. Slim currently controls 80% of Mexico's fixed line business and about 70% of the mobile sector. Senator Lozano also said the Senate is working on additional legislation to reform Mexico's telecommunications market.

## Defense/National Security

On September 27, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla condemned the recent formation of the paramilitary group Patrulla 1856, translated to The 1856 Patrol, named for the 1856 Campaign in which Costa Rica defeated the army of American William Walker. On its Facebook page, the group refers to Article 12 of Costa Rica's Constitution, explaining its purpose is to defend Costa Rica's national sovereignty from encroaching Nicaragua.

On September 27, officials in Honduras expressed alarm when a dead man was found hanging from a bridge in downtown Tegucigalpa. Police are worried the incident may be indicative of resurgence in gang violence and drug trafficking activities that contributed to Honduras reaching the highest murder rate in the world last year.

On September 29, Mexican authorities reported nine people were killed and six others were wounded in three separate drug gang related incidents in the cities of Cuernavaca, Fresnillo, and Monterrey. The attacks are still under investigation and it remains unclear if the incidents are related.

On September 29, heavy rains in Monterrey resulted in the collapse of the Roman Catholic Church of Santa Clara de Asis, which was under construction. A 10-year old boy was killed and 24 churchgoers were injured. Those wounded were hospitalized, with the severity of their

conditions initially unclear.

On September 29, the Costa Rican Coast Guard detained a speed boat that was trafficking drugs through Costa Rican waters off the coast of Limon. During the chase, the drug traffickers discarded 2,000 pounds of marijuana into the sea. Authorities recovered an additional 2,000 pounds of marijuana on board. Six crew members, including three Nicaraguans, one Colombian, one Costa Rican, and one Jamaican were arrested.

On September 29, the Government of El Salvador issued an emergency alert cautioning the 2,000 families living in the Chaparrastique volcano area of landslides resulting from heavy rains associated with the tropical storms lingering in the region. The alert will remain in effect through the end of the rainy season in November. The alert also suggested preventative measures, including evacuations and early warning systems, to be implemented by local authorities.

On September 30, Mexican authorities rescued 73 suspected kidnap victims from a house near the border city of Reynosa. The victims, including 37 from Mexico, 19 from Honduras, 14 from Guatemala, and three from El Salvador, are thought to have been kidnapped on buses or at bus stations and reported sexual abuse by their captors who pursued the victims' families for ransom. Three suspects are being held in connection with the kidnappings. Police also seized weapons, guns, and drugs from the home where the victims were rescued.

On September 30, the Partnership for a Secure America hosted a briefing on the U.S.-Mexico security relationship, featuring Georgetown University Professor John Bailey and Inigo Guevara Moyano, a Mexican writer and analyst specializing in Latin American defense and security issues. The discussion focused on developments in the U.S.-Mexico security relationship since the election of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

On October 1, at least eight crocodiles were captured in Acapulco. The animals were stranded inland following Tropical Storm Manuel and Hurricane Ingrid, which recently hit Mexico. The crocodiles' captures follows an incident in the neighboring Oaxaca state where a stranded crocodile attacked and killed a child.

On October 1, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla announced she will unilaterally enforce the U.N. Arms Trade Treaty. Costa Rica approved the agreement on September 4 with a unanimous vote in the legislature. President Chinchilla said the treaty will prevent ammunition, weapons, and components from falling into the hands of people who abuse human rights and violate international humanitarian law.

On October 2, rescue crews in Mexico discovered 10 more victims' bodies following recent storms along the Pacific and Gulf coasts. Coordinator Nacional de Proteccion de la Secretaria de Gobernacion Luis Felipe Puente said the discovery of additional victims brings the storms' death toll to 157.

On October 2, a family of five living in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, was killed when suspected gang members broke into the family's home and launched an attack. While a formal investigation is underway, initial evidence suggests the murders were retaliation for the family's refusal to pay a war tax instituted by the street gang.

On October 3, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), Mexico's statistics bureau, unveiled a new report on public security. The report finds 105,682 kidnappings were committed in Mexico last year and 99% of those kidnappings went unreported, primarily

because victims felt nothing could be done or because they feared repercussions. The report also finds police officials are negligent in investigating crime, as only 4.5% of crimes committed in 2011 were investigated. For serious crimes, such as murder, the report also suggests government is also ineffective, with 98% of cases reported last year remaining unsolved.

On October 3, Jorge Guevara, a Costa Rican hotel security guard who shot Justin David Johnson, an American tourist who he suspected was a burglar, was acquitted on charges of homicide during a second trial. Guevara said he fired a warning shot when he saw the teenager try to enter the hotel's property from a neighboring hotel in June 2011. While initially sentenced to 15 years in prison, the initial decision was appealed by Costa Rican prosecutors.

On October 5, Mexican authorities arrested renowned drug lord Eduardo Villatoro Cano and handed him over to Guatemalan authorities. Cano has been identified as the mastermind behind a June attack against a police unit along the "cocaine route" in northwestern Guatemala that left eight police officers dead. Following Cano's capture, Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina said Cano's gang has now been dismantled.

On October 6, a series of earthquakes affected the coast of Guerrero state in Mexico. Beginning around 8:30AM and lasting for three hours, the earthquakes varied in strength, with earthquakes reaching a magnitude as high as 5.21. While no deaths or significant damage were reported, many of the villages that experienced the earthquake have also recently been affected by tropical storms.

On October 7, journalist Glenn Greenwald provided testimony before a panel at the Brazilian Senate, asking that they allow former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden to move to Brazil.

On October 8, police in El Salvador discovered 213 grenades manufactured in the U.S. and China buried four feet underground approximately 30 miles from the capital city of San Salvador. While investigations continue, Salvadoran Attorney General Luis Martinez speculated the weapons belong to the Mexican Zetas cartel, which may have received assistance from military personnel in securing the weapons.

On October 9, Panamanian Foreign Minister Fernando Nunez Fabrega said in light of recent focus on chemical weapons in Syria, Panama is increasingly optimistic the U.S. will retrieve chemical weapons that remain in Panama from weapons testing that occurred between 1945 and 1947. The U.S. has previously offered to train Panamanians on handling such munitions, but a deal was never reached because Panama would not agree to waive U.S. liability. Reports indicate the Pentagon is reviewing Panama's requests to have the toxic ordinance removed.

On October 10, Costa Rican Attorney General Carlos María announced three Costa Rican doctors who worked at Calderon Guardia Hospital in San José and a Greek citizen have been detained under suspicion they are part of a kidney trafficking ring. In June, Costa Rican police arrested another doctor and one other government official who were also suspected to be part of the operation.

## **Economy/Trade**

On September 29, Spain's trade attaché Reyes Sallent, Honduran Finance Minister Wilfredo Cerrato, Honduran Under Secretary of Planning and Foreign Cooperation Maria Puerto, and Vice President of the Central American Bank of Economic Integration (BCIE) Alejandro Rodriguez signed an agreement recognizing Spain's \$1.2 million commitment to develop the National

Network of Multimedia Centers for socio-economic development in Honduras. Three multimedia centers will be created to enhance access to computer technology and communications between government institutions and Honduran companies.

On September 30, quarterly currency statistics for the Mexican peso were made available. The peso weakened 1.2% against the U.S. dollar over the most recent quarter, due primarily to concerns about the U.S. economy and potential monetary adjustments by the U.S. Federal Reserve.

On September 30, Mexican Stock Exchange Chief Executive Luis Tellez said there could be as many as five additional stock offerings in 2013, beyond offerings for dairy producer Lala, investment bank Banco Interacciones, hotel group Grupo Hotelero Sante Fe, and real estate investment trust Grupo Danhos, which are already in progress. Mexican companies raised record amounts in the equity market this year, despite the economic slowdown in the U.S.

On September 30, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce hosted a conference on the "Economic Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean." Presenters included Representative Matt Salmon (R-AZ), Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY), Chilean Minister of Foreign Relations Alfredo Moreno Charme, Columbian Vice Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism, and Ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Gabriel Duque, Mexican Under Secretary of Commerce Francisco Rosenweig, Peruvian Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism Magali Silva Velarde-Alvarez, and Jodi Bond and Patrick Kilbride of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

On October 1, Mexican economists projected Mexico's economic growth rate has slowed to 1.7% as a result of slow financial recovery in the U.S. and under-spending by the Mexican Treasury. In addition, Mexican Finance Minister Luis Videgaray said the recent hurricane and tropical storms along Mexico's coast will negatively impact economic growth. At the start of the year, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto pledged to bring Mexico's economic growth rate to 3.5%.

On October 1-4, Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar traveled to Panama City, Panama, to lead the country's delegation to the America Competitiveness Forum (ACF). The ACF brings together 1,000 public and private sector leaders from 34 countries to discuss strategies for achieving economic competitiveness and promoting innovation in the Americas. In addition, Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar attended a signing ceremony for the Partial Scope Trade Agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Panama.

On October 2, the World Bank issued a new report predicting that remittances in Latin America will total \$61 billion this year, representing a 2.5% increase from 2012. While total remittances to Latin America are expected to increase to \$75 billion and \$84 billion in 2014 and 2015, respectively, the report also finds Mexico is unlikely to see an increase in remittances due to slow economic recovery in the U.S. and slower rates of immigration.

On October 2, Belize Bank froze the accounts of Orange Walk when the town council failed to service a \$56,000 debt inherited from the previous administration. The bank converted the overdraft into a non-performing loan and demanded it be paid in full, even though Mayor Kevin Bernard has said he has previously appealed to the government for financial assistance.

On October 3, Panama's Ministry of Economy said the country's economic growth is up 6.28% since last year. Accordingly, the Ministry adjusted projections for Panama's economic growth rate for this year to 8.5%. The increase in economic growth is attributed to infrastructure spending, including the expansion of the Panama canal and the construction of Central America's first metro system. Panama's mining and telecommunications sectors also

experienced significant growth.

On October 4, Chile and Thailand finalized a Free Trade Agreement that was first initiated a decade ago, with negotiations starting in 2011. Thailand also has a FTA with Peru. Implementation of the new Chile-Thailand FTA is expected to be implemented in 2014.

## Energy

On September 28-30, protests in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, against a proposed hydroelectric dam resulted in the death of one soldier and several other injuries when Guatemalan security forces composed of riot police and soldiers released tear gas. Interior Minister López Bonilla issued 13 arrest warrants related to the protests and the death of the soldier and threatened to deport any foreigners believed to be fueling the protests.

On October 1, six workers were injured in an accident at Mexico's second largest refinery, Miguel Hidalgo. While few details on the incident were made publically available, Pemex said the refinery's 325,000 barrels daily output was not affected.

On October 1, the Honduran Maquila Association (AHM) released a report by the Central Bank of Honduras (BCH) indicating four biomass projects will come online in Honduras by the end of 2015. The projects, funded in part by \$320 million in U.S. investment, as well as investments by the Honduran manufacturing sector, will be developed in Choloma, Potrerillos, and Quimistan, and will be used to replace thermal energy with electricity generated from biomass.

On October 2, National Geographic highlighted next steps on the implementation of energy sector reforms proposed by Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto. This month, the Mexican National Congress is expected to vote on a measure that would reopen Mexico's oil and natural gas fields to foreign companies for the first time since 1938. While more than one third of federal revenue is raised from taxes and fees on oil and gas production, protests are planned by opposition groups that support the ban on foreign companies' participation in the market. Meanwhile, Mexican regulators are reportedly working with U.S. securities officials to develop a framework for profit-sharing contracts.

On October 2, Costa Rican Minister of Environment and Energy René Castro said reforestation in Costa Rica is moving the country closer to its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2021. Since 2007, Costa Rica has been implementing the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) international strategy. As a result, the country has recovered 48,034 hectares and plans to reforest an additional 7,500 hectares by the end of 2013.

On October 8, Brazil's Federal Official Gazette indicated that the Brazilian Electricity Regulatory Agency has received applications for approval of 29 solar photovoltaic projects to be located in the states of Bahia, Ceara, and Pernambuco. Submitted by a 12 local developers and Enel Green Power Desenvolvimento, the Latin American subsidiary of Enel Green Power, the projects would have a total capacity of 700MW.

On October 9, a gas pipeline in Colombia, owned by Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA, was bombed, with police blaming FARC rebels. The attack has blocked the export of 150 million cubic feet of product to Venezuela. The pipeline carries gas from the Ballenas field, which is jointly operated by Colombia's state-run oil company Ecopetrol and Chevron.

On October 10, the government of Argentina announced that the price cap on fuel prices, in effect for six months and set to expire, would be extended for an additional 45 days. The

government's efforts are aimed at managing the double-digit inflation affecting the Argentine economy.

On October 10, media reports state that the government of Argentina intends to begin Phase 3 of the Arauco wind farm in that country's province of La Rioja. This will bring installed capacity of the project to 50MW with capacity expected to reach 200MW.

## Electoral Politics

On October 2, Costa Rican Supreme Elections Tribunal President Luis Antonia Sobrado officially opened the 2014 elections season in San José. Speaking to candidates, elections stakeholders, and the press, President Sobrado called for civility in upcoming elections, scheduled for February 4<sup>th</sup>. Early next year, Costa Rican voters will elect a president, two vice presidents, and 57 Legislative Assembly representatives. Wednesday's event was attended by presidential candidates, including front runner Johnny Araya of the National Liberation Party (PLN), Otto Guevara of the Libertarian Movement Party, Luis Guillermo Solís of the Citizen Action Party, and José María Villalta of the Broad Front Party.

On October 3, candidates in El Salvador's 2014 presidential election candidates officially launched their campaigns. Current Vice President and presidential candidate Salvador Sánchez Cerén and vice presidential candidate Oscar Ortiz of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) spent the day campaigning in San Salvador. Meanwhile, Norman Quijano of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) kicked off his rebuilding themed campaign in Izalco.

Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner underwent brain surgery on October 9 to address a chronic subdural hematoma resulting from a fall earlier this year. She will spend the month of October recuperating, leading up to October 27 mid-term congressional elections where her political party, the Front for Victory, is facing a challenging environment in light of economic conditions in the country. President Kirchner is serving her second term as president and cannot seek reelection in 2015.

## Human Rights

On September 30, the Archbishop of San Salvador José Luis Escobar Alias closed the offices of the Archdiocese's Tutela Legal. The office has traditionally investigated human rights abuses in El Salvador. Employees were dismissed and given severance pay when they arrived for work. Archbishop Alias' only justification for closing the office was his belief the institution is no longer needed.

On October 3, following the Prime Minister of Belize Dean Barrow's call for LGBT equality, Central America's primary LGBT rights advocacy group, UNIBAM continued to prepare for a court ruling on a case heard in May against Section 53 of Belize's criminal code, which criminalizes sodomy. While analysts believe the law will be struck down, Belize's legislature is due to consider legislation that would change Section 46 of the criminal code to put male anal or oral rape on par with female rape for the first time. Public comments on the proposed legislation are due by October 8.

On October 3, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) hosted Christopher Sabatini and Alana Tummino of Americas Quarterly to present the results of the 2013 Social Inclusion Index. The index examines issues of inclusivity in Latin America, including access to public and private goods by race, ethnicity, and gender. This year's report also examines LGBT rights, women's rights, and financial inclusion.



## International Relations

On September 26, Guatemalan Ambassador to the U.S. Julio Ligorria said Guatemala recently created a task force, under the leadership of Vice President Roxana Baldetti, with the objective of expediting pending adoptions of 15 Guatemalan babies and finishing the process by the end of the calendar year. While Guatemala has traditionally allowed more than 4,000 children to be adopted by U.S. couples annually, foreign adoptions were suspended in 2007 in light of concerns of fraud and baby theft.

On September 30, addressing the U.N. General Assembly, Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Samuel Santos Lopez said Nicaragua has made significant progress in addressing poverty, hunger, and inequality, while strengthening international economic and commercial ties. While attending the U.N. Meeting, Foreign Minister Lopez also met with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The leaders discussed the post-2015 development agenda and the pending U.N. Security Council resolution on Syria.

On September 30, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla welcomed Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to San José. Both leaders are the first female heads of states for their respective countries. In addition, the meeting marks the first official meeting between Costa Rican and Liberian heads of state since the 1970s. The bilateral meeting focused on establishing a formal relationship between the two countries. The leaders also discussed international work on women's rights and environmental protection.

On September 30, Foreign Minister of Belize Wilfred Erlington accused developed countries at the U.N. General Assembly of abandoning the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) and called for global partnership on development. He said rich countries need to uphold their commitments to support developing countries in meeting the MDGs, especially the poor countries that lack the leadership, financial, and human resources to make progress on development.

In an interview with Spanish-language media, Ecuador's president Rafael Correa criticized President Obama's comments at the United Nation's General Assembly regarding "American exceptionalism," saying that such views are reminiscent of Nazi Germany.

On October 2, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla held a press conference to announce the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will hold a new hearing on the territorial conflict between Costa Rica and Nicaragua October 14-17. The case has been before the ICJ since 2010. In 2011, the Court issued precautionary measures to prevent both countries from entering territory near Isla Portillos. Costa Rica contends Nicaragua has not upheld its commitments under these measures and Costa Rican Foreign Minister Enrique Castillo said it will insist the ICJ force Nicaragua to vacate the area in the upcoming proceedings.

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, Honduras will open an embassy in Moscow, Russia. A ceremony planned to mark the embassy's opening will be attended by Honduran Foreign Minister Mireya Aguero, who will be visiting Russia October 14-16. In addition, Minister Aguero is anticipated to meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Larov and to hold meetings at the Russian Chamber of Commerce and the People's Friendship University of Russia.

## Labor

On September 27, the Panamanian National Commission of Medical Negotiations (Comisión Médica Negociadora Nacional, or COMENENAL) announced an indefinite strike over legislation passed by Panama's National Assembly that would allow the recruitment and hiring of foreign medical professionals. COMENENAL has argued the law impacts employment stability for medical professionals. Meanwhile, Panamanian Minister of Health Javier Diaz has said the law's intent is to improve access to health care without forcing patients into private clinics.

## Transportation/Infrastructure

On September 30, officials from Costa Rica's Civil Aviation Administration presented environmental impact studies for the construction of the Brunca International Airport in the country's Southern Zone. The Environment Ministry's National Technical Secretariat will now analyze the study and hold public hearings as part of the process for approving the project.

On September 30, Panama Canal Authority (ACP) Administrator Jorge Quijana projected with the end of the fiscal year, cargo volumes transported through the Panama Canal would have fallen by 4.1%. He attributed some of the loss to the U.S. decision to transport grain cargo to Argentina along a different route.

On October 2, National Car Rental and Alamo Rent A Car, both operated by Enterprise Holdings, which is the largest rental car company in Latin America and the Caribbean, announced the company's expansion into Belize. By early 2014, rental cars will be made available at the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport in Ladyville, Belize.

On October 5, a monster truck spun out of control at the Extremo Aeroshow in Chichuahua, Mexico, killing at least eight spectators and wounding several others, including 28 people who remain hospitalized. State Governor Cesar Duarte said it is possible the truck's driver may have been under the influence of alcohol when the incident occurred. Blood tests were conducted and will play a role in determining responsibility for the crash.

On October 10, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla signed a deal with the Export-Import Bank of China for a \$395 million loan package that will be used to fund the renovation and expansion of the Route 32 highway between San José and Limón. The project, which also entails the construction of bike paths, bridges, pedestrian crossings, and bus stops, could begin as early as next month, pending congressional approval.

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