



Georgette Spanjich
GMSpanjich@mlstrategies.com

Neal Martin
RNMartin@mlstrategies.com

ML Strategies, LLC
701 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004 USA
202 296 3622
202 434 7400 fax
www.mlstrategies.com

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MLS Update: Latin America and the Caribbean

UNITED STATES – LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN RELATIONS

White House

On October 22, Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs Jose Antonio Meade said President Barack Obama promised Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto an investigation into reported U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) spying on Mexico's presidential email system. White House National Security Council Spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said the U.S. will not conduct a specific investigation into claims related to Mexico, but will examine the allegations as part of a previously announced review of how the U.S. collects intelligence.

On October 23, Vice President Joe Biden spoke with Haitian President Michel Martelly by phone, continuing past conversations on the U.S. support for Haiti's reconstruction, development, and democratic progress. President Martelly also reported on efforts to strengthen Haiti's democratic institutions, including the work of the Transitional College of the Permanent Electoral Council to set a date for elections.

On October 31, the Office of the White House Press Secretary issued a release announcing President Barack Obama will host Columbian President Juan Manuel Santos at the White House on December 3rd. The leaders are anticipated to discuss security, respect for human rights, and efforts to grow the U.S.-Columbia trade relationship, including through the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement.

On November 8, Vice President Joe Biden spoke with Peruvian President Ollanta Humala by phone to follow up on items from President Humala's June 2013 visit to Washington, DC. The leaders discussed the ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations, as well as bilateral issues, including economic cooperation and citizen security.

On November 12, the White House announced Vice President Joe Biden will travel to Panama the third week of November to meet with Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli and to visit the Panama Canal expansion project. Vice President Biden was scheduled to visit Panama in

September following a visit to Mexico, but his trip was postponed due to the crisis in Syria.

Congress

On October 28, Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) criticized the National Security Agency (NSA) for its surveillance of world leaders. In particular, Senator Feinstein addressed allegations of U.S. spying in Mexico, and said the President should be required to approve the collection of such data.

On October 31, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee advanced several State Department nominations. By a voice vote, the Committee approved the nominations of James Brewster, Jr. to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Brian Nichols to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Peru, and Carlos Roberto Moreno to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Belize.

On November 8, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), who previously served as Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, issued a response to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's proposal to reform the country's Constitution regarding presidential terms. Representative Ros-Lehtinen opposed President Ortega's call for the removal of presidential term limits, stating such an amendment to the country's constitution would dismantle Nicaragua's democratic process.

Department of Commerce

On October 28, Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker met with Mexican Secretary of Economy Ildefonso Guajardo and Canadian Trade Minister Ed Fast on the sidelines of the North American Competitiveness and Innovation Conference held in San Diego, California. During the meeting, Secretary Pritzker pledged to maintain good economic relations with Mexico and Canada, including through increased regulatory cooperation and the ongoing TPP negotiations.

Department of Defense

On October 21, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) released information on Operation Martillo, a U.S., European, and Western Hemisphere mission targeting illicit trafficking routes along the Central American coast. As part of the operation, a U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET), working in partnership with the Colombian Navy, disrupted the shipment of 1,000 kg of cocaine worth \$80 million. Since its start in January 2012, Operation Martillo has confiscated 318,133 pounds of cocaine and 25,052 pounds of marijuana, worth \$40 billion.

On October 21-22, U.S. guided-missile frigate, the U.S.S. Rentz conducted a Safety-of-Life-at-Sea operation rescue for a fishing vessel spotted 200 nautical miles off the coast of Ecuador. The fishing boat has been stranded for ten days, following an encounter with bad weather. U.S. forces provided the crew with meals and enough fuel to return home.

On October 24-25, SOUTHCOM observed the 30th anniversary of the U.S.-Caribbean military operations in Grenada that sought to restore security and democratic institutions in the Eastern Caribbean island state. SOUTHCOM Commander General John Kelly traveled to Grenada to join U.S. Ambassador to Grenada Larry Palmer, Grenada Prime Minister Keith Mitchell, and Grenada Governor General Cecile La Grenade for memorial services for the victims. SOUTHCOM also issued a fact sheet on the intervention.

On October 28, SOUTHCOM held a memorial service in honor of Air Force Master Sergeant Martin Gonzales, who was killed on October 5, when his plane crashed in Columbia near the

Panamanian border. The aircraft had been conducting detection and monitoring operations in support of Operation Martillo.

On October 30, U.S. Airmen participated in a live hoist training exercise with Honduran soldiers in Puerto Castilla, Honduras. The exercise allowed U.S. military personnel to train Honduran service members on hoist operations, setting up a landing zone, and other capabilities for medical evacuations.

On October 31, SOUTHCOM announced the participation of U.S. Airmen and National Guardsmen in CRUCEX, a Brazilian hosted air force exercise recently held in South America. The exercise allowed U.S. airmen the opportunity for exchanges with partner nation air forces as well as the sharing of best practices to develop a common Airmen culture.

On November 2, SOUTHCOM reported on the completion of the first deployment of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Technical Assistance Field Team (CBSI TAFT) to Grenada to provide technical support to the local Coast Guard and police forces. CBSI TAFT assisted with small boat repairs, the development of maintenance plans, and improvement of logistics and supply processes.

On November 4-15, the U.S. Air Force participated in Cruzeiro do Sul Exercise, a Brazilian air training exercise. The exercise combines coalition and aerial refueling training with combat search and rescue training, with the goal of improving interoperability.

On November 7, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Stikinak returned to its home port of Miami, Florida, after participating in Operation Martillo, a Latin American military exercise to counter the use of Central American littorals as transshipment routes for illicit, drugs, weapons, and cash. Upon returning to the U.S., the ship offloaded approximately \$19 million worth of cocaine confiscated as part of the exercise.

Department of Justice

On October 23, U.S. and Panamanian officials finalized an agreement to share more than \$36 million in forfeited criminal assets. The funds were recovered as part of a money laundering bust in 2000, in which jewelry stores and other businesses were discovered to be laundering drug money in the Colon Free Trade Zone (CFZ) in Panama.

Department of State

On October 22, on behalf of the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs Daniel Reifsnnyder proposed amending the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer by phasing down the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), controlling byproduct emissions of HFC-23, addressing trade in HFCs, and requiring licensing systems and reporting on HFCs.

On October 23, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson met with Secretary General of the Central American Integration System (SICA) Hugo Martinez, at the Department of State.

On October 23, Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs Jose Antonio Meade said he will summon U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Anthony Wayne upon his return to Mexico for further discussions related to allegations of NSA spying on Mexico. Mexican Interior Minister Miguel Angel Osorio Chong also announced that Mexico will conduct its own investigation into the reports of U.S.

spying.

On October 24, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson met with Argentine Ambassador to the U.S. Cecilia Nahon and U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay James Thessin. Assistant Secretary Jacobson also attended the annual Oxi Day Foundation dinner to celebrate Berta Soler, a Cuban civil society activist receiving the Battle of Crete Award.

On October 27, Secretary of State John Kerry issued remarks in recognition of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' National Day. Secretary Kerry noted the U.S. and St. Vincent and the Grenadines share a partnership that benefits the greater Eastern Caribbean, on issues including HIV/AIDS, climate change, education, and workforce training.

On October 27, the State Department issued a press release welcoming the release of Kevin Sutay from captivity by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC). The State Department thanked the Columbian Government, as well as the Governments of Norway and Cuba, for their assistance in securing Sutay's freedom.

On October 29, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson participated in a Google+ Hangout on "Challenges for Women Leaders." Assistant Secretary Jacobson was joined by Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez. During the event, Assistant Secretary Jacobson and Sanchez responded to questions from Cuban youth on women's aspirations.

On October 30, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson met with U.S. Ambassador to Suriname Jay Anania and Dominican Republic Minister of the Presidency Gustavo Montalvo. Both meetings were held at the Department of State.

On October 31, Secretary of State John Kerry issued remarks in recognition of Antigua and Barbuda's National Day. Secretary Kerry highlighted the long history of cooperation and friendship between the U.S. and Antigua and Barbuda and noted both countries' commitment to improving safety, as evidenced by their participation in the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

On October 31, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson met with U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Anthony Wayne at the State Department.

On November 1, Secretary of State John Kerry issued a statement commemorating Panama's 110th Independence Day. Secretary Kerry recognized trade issues as important to the U.S.-Panama relationship, including the use of the U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement to expand economic opportunities for both nations and progress on the Panama Canal expansion project.

On November 1, Secretary of State John Kerry delivered remarks congratulating Dominica on its 35th Independence Day. Secretary Kerry said the U.S. and Dominica are united through a shared commitment to democracy, peace, and development, and noted the two countries are working together to strengthen regional security through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

On November 1, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson participated in a panel discussion at a conference on North America, hosted by American University.

On November 5, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson met with U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Liliana Ayalde at the Department of State. Later in the day, Assistant Secretary Jacobson met with educators from Mexico, Central America, and South

America as part of the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) “100,000 Strong: Expanding International Exchange in Higher Education.”

On November 6, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson attended an event hosted by Colombian Ambassador to the U.S. Carlos Urrutia at the Colombian Embassy in Washington, DC.

On November 8-13, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson was on travel outside of Washington, DC. In Los Angeles, California, Assistant Secretary Jacobson delivered remarks at the Pacific Council on International Policy, met with local university international affairs and study abroad programs regarding President Barack Obama’s 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative and the U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation, and Research, and attended a Mexican American Leadership Initiative brunch. Assistant Secretary Jacobson then traveled to Beijing, China, for the Sixth U.S.-China Sub-Dialogue on Latin America, as well as a roundtable meeting with Latin American and Caribbean Ambassadors at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

On November 10-13, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson will be in Beijing to co-chair the Sixth U.S.-China Sub-Dialogue on Latin America, an annual dialogue with China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to share views and policy priorities on Latin America and the Caribbean. Following the Sub-Dialogue, on November 13, she will give remarks at a symposium of Chinese academic experts on Latin America hosted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Assistant Secretary Jacobson will participate in a roundtable discussion with Latin American and Caribbean ambassadors at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

On November 12, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Uzra Zeya and Ambassador-At-Large for War Crimes Issues Stephen Rapp held separate meetings at the Department of State with the Attorney General of Guatemala Claudia Paz y Paz.

Department of Treasury

On October 21, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network and Mexico’s National Banking and Securities Commission signed a memorandum of understanding that will allow for information sharing on money laundering activities in both countries. The agreement is intended to help combat transnational financial crime.

Securities and Exchange Commission

On October 24, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) began conducting a nationwide probe of certain mutual funds that invest in Puerto Rican securities. Performed by the SEC’s Office of Compliance, Inspections, and Examinations, with support from regional offices, the endeavor is intended to reveal how much of Puerto Rico’s \$70 billion of outstanding debt is held by funds in the U.S., and how shareholders are being informed of the risks.

U.S. International Trade Commission

On November 1, the USITC determined that there is a reasonable indication that a U.S. industry is materially injured by reason of imports of steel concrete reinforcing bar from Mexico and Turkey that are allegedly sold in the United States at less than fair value and allegedly subsidized by the government of Turkey. Chairman Irving A. Williamson and Commissioners Dean A. Pinkert, David S. Johanson, and Meredith M. Broadbent voted in the affirmative. Commissioner Shara L. Aranoff voted in the affirmative with respect to subject imports from

Turkey and in the negative with respect to subject imports from Mexico. Commissioner F. Scott Kieff did not participate in these investigations. As a result of the Commission's affirmative determinations, the U.S. Department of Commerce will continue to conduct its investigations on imports of this product with its preliminary countervailing duty determination concerning Turkey due on or about December 16, 2013, and its preliminary antidumping duty determinations concerning Mexico and Turkey due on or about February 27, 2014.

U.S. Trade Representative

On October 25, following the AFL-CIO's call for an arbitral panel to examine Guatemala's compliance with labor laws under the Central American Free Trade Agreement, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Michael Froman issued a press release announcing plans to allow Guatemala six months to effectively implement an enforcement plan. Ambassador Froman noted areas requiring attention, including developing an expedited process to sanction Guatemalan employers that violate labor laws, as well as a contingency mechanism to pay workers where export enterprises have closed.

On October 29, Ambassador Michael Froman met with Mexican Secretary of Economy Ildefonso Guajardo to discuss bilateral issues in the ongoing TPP negotiations.

On November 7 in Lima, Peru, the USTR Environment and Natural Resources Director Sarah Stewart participated in a Stakeholders' Roundtable to discuss trade and environment issues under the U.S.-Peru trade promotion agreement.

On November 13, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for the Western Hemisphere John Melle will give keynote remarks in Panama City, Panama at an American Chamber of Commerce And Industry of Panama-sponsored event reviewing first-year accomplishments under the U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement.

On November 15 in Washington, DC, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Miriam Sapiro will host the first meeting under the Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Caribbean Community Concerning a United States-CARICOM Council on Trade and Investment (U.S. – CARICOM TIFA).

Organization of American States

On October 23, the Organization of American States (OAS), in partnership with the National Office on Electoral Processes of Peru (ONPE), launched a two-day seminar on comparative experiences in the implementation of electronic voting. The event brought together experts from other Latin American countries and Europe to discuss best practices in adopting an electronic voting system.

On October 30, OAS Director of the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation Betilde Munoz-Pogossian and President of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador Eugenio Chicas signed a technical cooperation agreement allowing the OAS to assist with the implementation of recommendations to improve El Salvador's electoral register.

On October 31, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza met with Mexican Deputy Secretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights Juan Manuel Gomez Robledo at OAS headquarters in Washington, DC. Secretary General Insulza and Deputy Secretary Robledo discussed politics in the Western Hemisphere, the debate over the Strategic Vision of the OAS, and the 149th Period of Sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), held October 28-

November 8.

On November 1, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza held a ceremony to receive the credentials of Pedro Verges, the new Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the OAS. During his remarks, Ambassador Verges highlighted how the Dominican Republic has used the democratic system to strengthen political institutions and improve the country's justice, health, and education systems.

On November 1, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza met with Colombian Deputy Defense Minister Jorge Enrique Bedoya. The discussion was centered on preparations for the Fourth Meeting of Ministers of Public Security in the Americas (MISPVA IV), which will be held in Medellin, Colombia, November 21-22.

On November 2, the OAS deployed an electoral observation mission to Honduras in advance of the approaching November 24 elections. OAS observers will tour the country to monitor compliance with the electoral calendar and political campaign. Additionally, OAS observers will meet with representatives of political parties and civil society and audit the new Integrated System of Electoral Vote Counting and Disclosure, (SIEDE), which will be used in the upcoming vote.

On November 6, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza presented the latest report of the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia to the OAS Permanent Council. The report applauds efforts of the Colombian Government to address restitution of victims, but also notes challenges ahead, such as the need to strengthen security and expedite the identification of those guilty of crimes.

On November 9, the OAS hosted its 53rd Policy Roundtable on "Mediation and Dialogue in the Americas in the 21st Century." In addition to the presentation of the OAS-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Practical Guide on Democratic Dialogue, and the U.N. Guidance for Effective Mediation, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza provided remarks highlighting the successes of past OAS efforts to promote democratic dialogue, including in Nicaragua, Suriname, Haiti, Guatemala, Columbia, and Belize.

On November 11, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza and Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the OAS Joaquin Maza Martelli signed an agreement stipulating the conditions for the work of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) deploying to El Salvador in advance of presidential elections, scheduled for February 2, 2014. Initial visits are slated to begin in December.

On November 11, the OAS convened a regional symposium on cyber security in Montevideo, Uruguay. The event brought together government and private sector stakeholders from more than 30 countries to discuss the development and implementation of national cyber security strategies.

On November 11-12, the OAS convened the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) in Medellin, Colombia. The ministers addressed several relevant labor issues, including articulation of economic and labor policies, the role of employment in equality and development, protection of workers' rights, and social dialogue.

Communications

On October 29, lawmakers in Brazil began debating online privacy legislation that would

restrict how Internet service providers use the personal data of Brazilians. The bill would prohibit companies from storing email and voice communications and require them to keep information on IP addresses and connection durations on file for one year. Industry groups in Brazil oppose the legislation because they believe it will result in decreased data security, higher costs for services, lower innovation, and limited consumer access to cloud services.

On November 10, the Committee on Radiocommunications of the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) met in Managua, Nicaragua. OAS and industry representatives discussed terrestrial fixed and mobile radio communications services, satellite communications systems, and the use of new technologies for radio and television broadcasting.

On November 11, El Salvador's power and telecommunications regulator Signet reopened bidding for the 1,900 MHz and 1,700-2,100 MHz advanced wireless services spectrum blocks. The auction had initially been delayed due to the concerns of anti-trust regulators. Several telecommunications stakeholders, including Intelfon, Red, Salnet, and ICE, have all expressed interest in bidding.

On November 11, Mexican Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFT) President Gabriel Contreas said the agency may inform companies they have been identified as predominant economic agents in the local market as soon as this month. Under new laws, policies are under development that will target telecommunications monopolies in order to level the playing field. Telecommunications company America Movil and broadcaster Televisa are widely anticipated to be labeled as predominant economic agents in the forthcoming announcement.

On November 11, Nicaraguan Institute for Telecommunications and Posts (Telcor) CEO Orlando Castillo said Nicaragua's communication satellite Nicasat-1 will be ready to launch into orbit by the third quarter of 2016. The \$254 million satellite will be used to provide mobile phone, data, and Internet services.

Defense/National Security

On October 27, the Costa Rican Coast Guard and the Judicial Investigation Police in Limon captured a boat abandoned in Playa Negra carrying more than 2,800 pounds of cocaine. Since the start of 2013, more than 15 tons of cocaine has been confiscated off Costa Rica's coasts.

On October 28, Nicaraguan police, working in coordination with Salvadoran police, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Russian Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN), detained renowned Mexican Sinaloa cartel drug trafficker Claudio Reinaldo Mendoza in Costa Rica. Mendoza, who has smuggled more than 30 tons of cocaine from Costa Rica to Nicaragua, worth \$200 million, has been deported to Nicaragua.

On October 29, in recognition of the one year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, Director of the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean Heraldo Munoz called on New Yorkers not to forget the storm's impact on the Caribbean. In particular, he noted the storm was incredibly costly for Cuba and Haiti.

On October 29, the Salvadoran Cuscatlan Joint Group (GCC), composed of the National Civil Police (PNC), the Armed Forces of El Salvador (FAES), and the Attorney General's Office (FGR), reported on its achievements since its formation in March 2012. From March 2012, through October 2013, the GCC, which is seeking to address narcotics trafficking, reported confiscating more than 500 kilograms of cocaine and marijuana worth more than \$12 million.

On October 29, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla attributed overcrowding in Costa Rican prisons to the successful work of police, judges, and prosecutors to get criminals off the streets. President Chinchilla's comments come as inmates identified by Costa Rica's National Institute of Criminology (INC) are due to be released to address the overcrowding problems.

On October 30, Mexican officials shut down a tunnel under the U.S.-Mexico border that had been used to smuggle cocaine and marijuana. Three people were taken into custody in connection with the ongoing investigation and federal agents seized eight tons of marijuana and 325 pounds of cocaine.

On October 31, Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes announced El Salvador will purchase ten secondhand Cessna Dragonfly light attack planes from Chile, retired in 2009, in a deal worth \$8.6 million. The announcement is a sign that, for the time being, Brazil's offer to sell El Salvador ten new Brazilian Embraer EMB314/A29 Super Tucano light attack fighters is off the table.

On November 1, Honduran Police Chief General Juan Carlos Bonilla disputed accusations of his involvement in running death squads a decade ago. He also praised the U.S. Embassy in Honduras for their support for police operations intended to combat drug trafficking.

Economy/Trade

On October 21, Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto issued a decree announcing amendments to Mexico's 1947 gambling law. The changes including a ban on slot machines and a prohibition on casino license holders lending their rights to third parties. In addition, updates to the law include new guidelines that require advertisements for gambling to indicate that minors are prohibited from taking part and to suggest that gamblers spend responsibly.

On October 27, negotiators from the 12 TPP countries met in Mexico City, Mexico, to discuss rules of origin. The meeting was one in a series of inter-sessional meetings, intended to keep the negotiations on target for wrapping up at the end of this year.

On October 30, the World Bank issued its Doing Business 2014 report. Of particular interest, nearly half of the countries in Latin America were included as part of the study, which highlights economies that have improved their business policies and made it easier for companies to grow. Mexico, Columbia, and Guatemala were identified among the best countries for doing business.

On October 30, the American University Washington College of Law held its ninth annual symposium on international trade. The event included a panel with major U.S. trade partners, including the Embassy of Brazil's Deputy Chief of Mission Ernesto Fraga Araujo.

On November 4 - 7, negotiators from the 12 TPP countries met in Santiago, Chile to discuss state-owned enterprises.

On November 5, Honduras and Canada signed a bilateral free trade agreement. The trade pact will eliminate 98% of tariffs between the two countries, including tariffs on many agricultural products that Canada has been seeking to export to Honduras.

On November 6, the Center for Economic and Policy Research unveiled a new report exploring developments in Honduras since the 2009 military coup that toppled President Manuel Zelaya. The report finds that economic and equality gains achieved under President Zelaya's Administration were reversed in the two years following the coup. The report also finds any

economic improvements in Honduras have only benefited the wealthiest 10% of the population.

On November 11, El Salvador's Ministry of Finance launched a new outreach campaign, known as Expresate, to teach Salvadoran youth how tax collection contributes to better communities. The program specifically targets youths ages 15-20 and is intended to teach them about El Salvador's fiscal affairs and to promote a culture where tax compliance is viewed as part of social responsibility.

On November 21-24, the Government of Chile will host a symposium on the Start-Up Chile Program. The program was created by the Chilean Government to attract early stage, high-potential entrepreneurs to Chile to initiate startups with the goal of going global.

Energy/Environment

On October 21, New York-based alternative energy investment firm Greenwood Biosar was awarded a contract for engineering, procurement, and construction of a solar farm near Chitre, Panama. The 2.4 megawatt solar farm will provide electricity to customers of state-owned utility Empresa de Generación Eléctrica (EGESA).

On October 22, Brazil auctioned off exploration rights for the Libra oil field off the coast of Rio de Janeiro to a number of foreign bidders, including European company Royal Dutch Shell and Chinese companies Cnooc Ltd. and China National Petroleum. Libra is anticipated to hold 12 billion barrels of recoverable oil and is potentially one of the largest oil fields in the world. Groups in Brazil have protested the sale of exploration rights to foreign companies.

On October 23, Brazil's National Petroleum Agency announced the discovery of large oil reserves off the coast of Sergipe. Speculation on the amount of oil contained in the reserves will not be announced until 2016.

On October 28, Mexican security officials announced they had killed two men suspected of involvement in attacks on a number of substations and gas stations in Michoacan a day earlier, and captured three others. The announcement came as power was restored to more than 400,000 people who experienced a blackout as a result of the attacks.

On October 30, 5,000 people were evacuated from a housing development near the Mexican town of Tlajomulco when a Pemex pipeline burst and began spewing gasoline into the air. Authorities were able to quickly shut down flow of the gas line and there were no reported injuries. Pemex claimed the incident was caused by oil theft.

On November 4, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, along with Mexican parliamentary groups, introduced legislation to amend Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which bans risk contracts in energy exploration and production activities. The proposal would allow the participation of private capital in Mexico's upstream oil and gas business.

On November 5, officials from Costa Rica and Nicaragua appeared before the International Court of Justice regarding Nicaragua's claims that road construction near the countries' shared border represents an environmental threat to the San Juan River. While Nicaragua is looking for the court to order a stop construction, Costa Rica presented technical studies in an attempt to dismiss Nicaragua's claims related to environmental damage.

On November 10, officials with Peru's state agency with jurisdiction of protection of natural sites discussed the decline in tourism associated with shrinking of the Pastoruri glacier in

central Peru. In less than 20 years, the glacier has shrunk to half its size, due to global warming. In an effort to reinvigorate tourism in the area, officials are attempting to rebrand the Pastoruri glacier as an example of climate change in action.

On November 11, as part of its efforts to mainstream solar energy technologies in the private sector, Belize's Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology, and Public Utilities hosted a workshop in Belize City to train technicians on installation and maintenance of solar panels.

Electoral Politics

On October 29, the Center for Economic and Policy Research held a briefing on the upcoming elections in Honduras and El Salvador. Presenters included Bertha Oliva of the Committee of the Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), Hector Perla of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Victor Fernandez of the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice.

On October 31, Honduran presidential candidate Xiomara Castro, the wife of ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, said, if elected she will seek a new deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to address the country's debt crisis, as a prior IMF agreement expired in March 2012. Castro is in a close race with conservative Juan Hernandez. Elections will be held on November 24.

On November 5, Amnesty International sent letters to all eight candidates in the upcoming presidential election in Honduras encouraging them to promise to address human rights abuses in the country prior to the November 24 elections. The letter outlines the nature of abuses in Honduras, which include consistent killings, physical attacks, and threats against human rights defenders.

On November 7, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for agreeing to allow the FARC's political participation if a peace deal can be struck as part of ongoing talks in Havana, Cuba. The agreement also calls on the FARC to disarm and form a political movement. OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insula has also expressed support for the agreement.

On November 7, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega pushed for constitutional changes that would eliminate presidential term limits. President Ortega's campaign comes as lawmakers begin considering his proposal to remove the article of the Nicaraguan Constitution prohibiting consecutive presidential terms. Nicaraguan lawmakers have formed a commission to study the proposal and are expected to issue a recommendation by December.

Health

On October 31, Nicaragua health officials deployed a new initiative to combat dengue fever. As part of the effort, hundreds of health workers began fumigating homes and streets against mosquitoes that spread dengue. Health care personnel have also been tasked with identifying people with dengue fever and moving them to facilities, as well as educating the general public on disease prevention.

On October 31, following the lead of other Latin American countries, the Mexican Congress approved a 1-peso per-liter tax on sugary drinks and an 8% tax on junk food. Lawmakers indicated the new policies are indented to curb Mexico's growing obesity problem, as well as to raise additional tax revenue. Globally, Mexicans consumer the most soda, on average 707 8-ounce servings per year.

Human Rights

On October 25, Guatemala's Constitutional Court ordered a lower court to reconsider whether or not a 1986 amnesty law applies in the case against former Guatemalan dictator Jose Efraim Rios Montt. Montt is facing charges of genocide related to the deaths of tens of thousands of indigenous Guatemalans during his rule in the 1980s. The trial is not anticipated to resume until January 2015.

On October 30, Nicaraguan director of the Esta Semana television program and its sister news website Confidencial Carlos Fernando Chamorro accused the Nicaraguan Army of spying on investigative journalist Ismael Lopez and his family. The Nicaraguan Democratic Bloc (BDN) and the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) have also called for an end to all spying on the media, especially as the Nicaraguan Constitution prohibits domestic spying and preserves the right to freedom of information.

International Relations

On October 22, at the end of Belizean Foreign Minister Wilfred Erlington's visit to Argentina, Minister Erlington and Argentinian Foreign Minister Hector Timerman signed a South to South agreement to promote bilateral cooperation on trade, education, cultural exchanges, health care, and agriculture. The agreement was signed following Minister Erlington's meetings with Argentina's Ministries of Industry and Tourism, and private sector experts on education and culture.

On October 27, Guatemalan Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Carrera Castro attending meetings in Canada and the U.S. as the North American nations begin to consider changing drug policy by decriminalizing the use of marijuana. Minister Carrera urged greater security cooperation to ensure that goods crossing Guatemala's border into the U.S. meet an acceptable standard of security.

On October 29, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the end of U.S. sanctions against Cuba. In total, 188 member states voted in favor of the resolution, with Israel and the U.S. voting against the resolution, and the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau abstaining.

On November 1, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation (SCRF) Nikolai Patrushev led a Russian delegation to Nicaragua for meetings on security issues. While in Nicaragua, Secretary Patrushev and Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega signed a memorandum of understanding to promote bilateral security cooperation.

On November 4, Brazil's Institutional Security Cabinet, which has jurisdiction over the country's intelligence activities, admitted to spying on diplomats from the U.S., Iran, and Russia. Intelligence officials insisted the Abin agency's activities were in compliance with legislation governing surveillance and were intended to protect Brazil's national sovereignty.

On November 5, Brazil's Congressional Foreign Relations Commission indicated it may schedule a hearing to question the head of Brazil's central intelligence agency, the Abin spy agency, Roberto Trezza, on reports suggesting a Brazilian spy was transferred after inappropriately passing intelligence to a U.S. official.

On November 11, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla met with Pope Francis at the Vatican

in Rome. President Chinchilla and Pope Francis discussed a number of issues, including abortion and Costa Rica's continuing border dispute with Nicaragua.

Labor

On October 22, the Costa Rican Government decided to begin granting amnesty to foreigners with an expired visa who continue working in the country. Upon filing the appropriate paperwork, laborers will be granted a ten-month extension for the purposes of completing their migratory documents. The policy is expected to benefit workers in Costa Rica's agriculture and construction sectors.

On November 11, mass protests were held across Costa Rica, impacting hospitals and schools and causing widespread traffic problems. Public and private labor unions, as well as other social groups, organized the demonstrations in response to a number of government grievances, including increased electric rates, proposed tax hikes, and a plan to privatize some health services.

Transportation/Infrastructure

On October 23, Costa Rica's Ministry of Public Works and Transportation (MOPT) and the National Roadway Council (CONAVI) began construction of a new road to the popular tourist destination, Monteverde Cloud Forest. The \$16 million project will significantly improve the existing gravel road in two phases of construction.

ON October 23, Costa Rica's MOPT announced preliminary findings of a pilot project in Guanacaste that is testing new asphalt mixes. According to Costa Rica's National Laboratory of Structural Models and Materials, the new mixture has been effective in combatting potholes and sinkholes, has resulted in greater resistance to water, and lowered the carbon footprint associated with paving.

On October 28, leader of global transportation procurement firm Procurian Ed Sans said the \$5.25 billion Panama Canal expansion project, started in 2007 and due to be completed in 2015, will not create as many new opportunities for eastern U.S. ports as anticipated. This is due to the fact that many U.S. ports will be unable to service larger ships that will begin to use the expanded waterway.

On October 29, a Nicaraguan delegation, led by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's son, Lauren Facundo Ortega Murillo, concluded a trip to China for meetings on a proposed \$40 billion Chinese canal project in Nicaragua. The proposed project is intended to rival the Panama Canal expansion project.

On November 6, William Potts, an American citizen who hijacked a Piedmont Airlines flight to Cuba in 1984, returned to the U.S. to face charges of air piracy. Potts, who could potentially face a sentence between 20 years and life in prison, said he hopes U.S. prosecutors credit him for the 13 years he spent in Cuban prison.

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