

SOUTH AMERICA

Andrés Mego in Lima

IIRSA: Incomplete integration

Initiative puts ecosystems and indigenous peoples at risk.

In a report titled "The New Drive for Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America" in 2000, the Inter-American Development Bank claims that "tremendous natural barriers, such as the Andes mountain range, the Amazon jungle and the Orinoco River basin" are the principle problems in making the physical integration of the continent possible, which would strengthen regional trade.

Also in the year 2000, at the First South American Presidential Summit held in Brazil under the country's then-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003), the fragmentation of physical infrastructure was also identified as one of the principal obstacles for competitive regional trade. As a solution, the summit participants agreed to develop a strategy that would aim to inter-connect national infrastructures.

This was the basis for the Initiative for Integration of Regional Infrastruc-

ture in South America (IIRSA), a continental strategy to promote the development of infrastructure projects in the areas of energy, transportation and communications.

Later, at the Third South American Presidential Summit in December 2004 in Cusco, Peru (*LP, Dec. 15, 2004*), IIRSA was confirmed as an important component in developing strategies for political integration and regional economy.

The presidents from all 12 South American countries approved the Implementation Agenda based on Consensus including 31 large-scale investment projects to be carried out from 2005 to 2010 for an estimated cost of US\$6.4 billion.

Though IIRSA, implemented in 2005, responds also to communities' legitimate desire to improve communication ways and could stimulate poverty reduction, the perception of nature as a "barrier" is one of civil society's principal criticisms toward the initiative.

"Within IIRSA, the Amazon is being seen as a great possibility to unite countries that always saw the jungle as an obstacle," said Elisangela Soldatelli Paim, project coordinator of Friends of the Earth-Brazil. "However, the initiative's logic is based merely on physical and

commercial integration, aiming at the exploitation of the continent's natural wealth."

Potential impacts

In his study "A Perfect Storm in the Amazon Wilderness," US biologist Timothy J. Killeen argued that "a visionary initiative such as IIRSA should be visionary in all of its dimensions, and should incorporate measures to ensure that the region's renewable natural resources are conserved and its traditional communities strengthened."

IIRSA has been designed without adequate consideration of its potential environmental and social impacts, which makes it a latent threat to aboriginal ecosystems and cultures. Considering that the majority of large-scale projects are being carried out in nature zones such as the Amazon, which are extremely vulnerable to change, the initiative's environmental component should be a priority.

One of the mega-projects defined in IIRSA's Implementation Agenda is the Inter-Oceanic Highway between Peru and Brazil, which already began asphaltting in Peru in 2005 at a cost of more than \$1 billion and will facilitate access between Brazilian states Acre and Rondônia and Pacific ports (*LP, Dec. 28, 2005*).

The most problematic aspects of

IIRSA: Integration and Development Zones



SOUTH AMERICA	1
IIRSA: Incomplete integration	
PERU	3
Modern slavery	
LATIN AMERICA	4
Interview with political scientist Kristen Sample	
ARGENTINA	5
Farmers declare one-month truce	
BOLIVIA	6
Corruption: A chronic problem?	
GUATEMALA	7
Losing the HIV battle	
HAITI	8
United Nations jolted by protests	
REMOVABLE REPORT:	
Biofuels jeopardize future	
LATIN AMERICA	i
Biofuels: Are they viable?	
BRAZIL	iii
Leading in ethanol production	
ARGENTINA	iv
Biofuels take over	

MEXICO

Green group honored. The Black Forest Foundation, an environmental organization founded by the Mexican rock band Maná, was named “The Americas’ Champion of Health” on April 7 — International Health Day — by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The organization recognized the foundation for environmental conservation and social development, themes tied to PAHO’s theme this year of protecting health in the face of climatic change.

The foundation, which was founded in 1995, runs projects in Mexico and other Latin American countries for reforestation, the protection of endangered species, recycling initiatives and environmental education. It also supports communities affected by natural disasters.

One of its most recent projects is the building of family-run gardens that help to conserve water and improve nutrition, especially for children and women. The project is operating in 11 countries worldwide, including Haiti, Mexico and Nicaragua. —LP.

this mega-project will be in the Amazonian department Madre de Dios in Peru, where there is already significant social and environmental liability as a result of informal mining and excessive logging. Although Madre de Dios is one of the departments with the most protected areas in Peru, government presence is weak.

An expert in environmental issues, Marc J. Dourojeanni, the author of “Case Study on the Interoceanic Highway in the Southern Peruvian Amazon,” warns that deforestation, forest degradation and invasion of protected and indigenous areas will worsen after asphaltting. However, according to Dourojeanni, “the principle objection to the work is not in direct reference to it but a lack of public mechanisms that allow expected impacts to be avoided and to promote sustainable development.”

Perhaps IIRSA’s most polemic project is the one to be executed on Brazilian territory: the hydroelectric power stations of the Madeira River. This enormous energy project already has environmental licenses from the government and bidding for the construction concession will open on May 12, drawing ire from environmentalists.

The Madeira River is the principle tributary to the Amazon, thus any possible impacts would be far-reaching. On the other hand, since the project is located near Bolivia, President Evo Morales’ government has protested about possible flooding that could cross the border.

Among other impacts, according to Killeen, the new highways will stimulate a massive migration of people to the Amazon region, competing with the local populations for resources. In places where the state presence is weak, such as Peru and Bolivia, this migration will increase unsustainable and illegal activities like informal mining, logging and the use of land for extensive agriculture (*LP, Dec. 12, 2007*).

A key recommendation in Killeen’s analysis is that the environmental studies of IIRSA must be comprehensive and not specific to each project: “The studies should keep in mind the secondary and accumulative impacts resulting from the multiple projects, including those financed by other agencies and the private sector.”

Brazilian sub-hegemony?

IIRSA’s antecedents can be found in plans that Brazil has put into practice since 1990 when the federal government summoned states and municipalities to adhere to development plans called Multi-Year Plans in order to integrate the Amazon into the Brazilian productive space and consolidate the political and economic hegemony that Brazil has in South America.

This initiative, known as “Brazil advances” and subsequently as “Brazil for everyone,” was based (just as IIRSA) on integration and development zones identified in order to incorporate new areas in the country to global trade.

The initiative strengthened the relationship between economy and improvements in infrastructure and stressed the need to connect Brazilian Amazon states (Acre, Amazonas and Rondônia), far from Atlantic ports, with the Pacific through its neighbors Bolivia and Peru.

In fact, in the implementation of major IIRSA projects, the participation of the public National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) — associated with the development, industry and foreign relations ministries — is fundamental for Brazilian companies operating in neighboring countries.

Important contracts for IIRSA projects have been awarded to consortia headed by big Brazilian construction companies, principally Odebrecht, since they have access to the credit given by BNDES according to its policy of promoting exportation of Brazilian goods and services.

At the same time, another factor pushing Brazil to launch IIRSA, as signaled by Peruvian economist Gustavo Guerra García, is “the Brazilian government’s need to counteract the negative effects of NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] concerning the exportation of Brazilian manufactured products.”

“The development model assumed by the Brazilian government for South America is the same one that is ongoing in Brazil,” claimed Jean-Pierre Leroy, member of the Brazilian Network for Environmental Justice. “Is it possible to talk about sub-hegemony? It’s undeniable that Brazil, divided by its interests and willingness to integrate, will position itself so that its leadership in the integration process is guaranteed.” □

CHILE

No “morning after” pill. President Michelle Bachelet said she lamented a decision by the Constitutional Court on April 4 that declared the distribution of the emergency contraceptive pill — known commonly as the “morning after pill” — in public health centers illegal. The ruling did not ban its sale in pharmacies.

“I deeply regret the ruling in a country that aspires to be in the big leagues, where people have equal opportunities for health, education and development,” she said. “This is a wound to the building of a more equal society.”

Bachelet underlined that the decision affects the poorest women who cannot afford to buy the pill in pharmacies.

The court made its ruling with five votes in favor and four against, approving an injunction presented by 31 right-wing legislators against a Health Ministry decree that approves the pill’s distribution for teenagers over the age of 14 without the consent of their parents (*LP, April 4, 2007*).

The judges did not speak out against other contraceptive methods, however. —LP.

PERU

Lily Céspedes in Lima

Modern slavery

Although it is a punishable crime, human trafficking is socially tolerated.

Considered one of the most serious crimes in the world, the trafficking of women, youths and children has become a modern form of slavery that affects 2.4 million people worldwide each year, with profits reaching some US\$32 billion annually, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO).

"It's a global situation that affects almost all countries. It has become an international problem and in order to fight it the work has to be coordinated between the authorities and governments of the world," warned Rosa Dominga Trapasso, US missionary who came to Peru over 50 years ago and who defends female victims of trafficking in the non-governmental organization Movimiento El Pozo, in Lima.

According to the report on the trafficking of women for sex trade in Peru, produced in 2005 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) along with Movimiento El Pozo, eight of every 10 cases identified in Peru are related to domestic trafficking.

"There is a custom of turning over or receiving children or youths whose parents can't take care of them, who fall, unfortunately, into the hands of human traffickers," said Tammy Quintanilla Zapata, director of Movimiento El Pozo.

However, Peru is considered the country of origin, transit and destination of human trafficking. According to the ILO, Peruvian women and girls are the principal victims of this crime and are sent to other countries in South America (Argentina and Bolivia), Western Europe (Italy and Spain), Japan and the United States for sexual exploitation.

Shocking stories

Rosa María, a 16-year old girl from Yurimaguas in the eastern Loreto department, used to live with her grandmother. When a friend offered her work at a dance club, she accepted and was taken to Chota in Cajamarca, in the north of the country, where the job was supposedly located. Upon her arrival, she was shocked to discover that the job was prostitution. However, the police was able to locate her and she was rescued by Movimiento El Pozo.

María, another youth who traveled legally to Japan in search of work, had a different experience. She was offered work, but was tricked. She was sold between pimps, kidnapped, prostituted and her documents taken from her. Her father reported her disappearance to Movimiento El Pozo. She managed to escape with the help of another woman and the authorities of the Peruvian Consulate in Japan helped her to repatriate

four years ago.

Rita was offered cleaning work in Argentina. She contacted the supposed employers, who paid for her trip, and she traveled by land, but realized on the way that she was traveling with a lot of young women. She was taken to the outskirts of Buenos Aires where she was shut in and forced to prostitute herself. After five years of captivity, she managed to save up money and escape.

There are thousands of cases like this, but many fear reporting these networks that work in nightclubs, bars, luxury hotels, important streets, military quarters, mining centers, tourist areas and border zones (*LP*, April 9, 2006).

Significant advances

After a four-year struggle, nongovernmental organizations defending women teamed up with government bodies and private companies in Peru to create a multi-sector commission that promoted Congress' approval of Law 28950 on Jan. 17, 2007, punishing human trafficking with prison time.

For congresswoman and lawyer Rosario Sassieta, first president of the Women Legislators Table of Peru, this law represents a significant advance since it implies a modification in the Peruvian criminal code, which did not previously recognize human trafficking as a crime, making it difficult to punish those who practiced it.

The new law establishes prison sentences between eight and 15 years for those who promote human trafficking, including the individuals who favor, finance, receive, transport, transfer, kidnap or trick for the purpose of sexual exploitation or receive the victim inside or outside Peruvian territory. When the victims are minors and the person involved in trafficking is a public employee, the sentence is 12 to 20 years. In the case that the victim is murdered or seriously injured, the punishment is no less than 25 years in prison.

In order to help prevent trafficking, the National Plan of Action against Human Trafficking 2007-2013 has also been established in Peru, which promotes the new law's implementation and offers victim assistance through a telephone help line. Between March 2006 and 2007, over 8,500 calls have been registered, resulting in 60 reports to the police and Attorney General's Office for investigation.

However, little information is available on how trafficking networks operate and even less information on people who have been condemned for this crime.

Sassieta hopes that after the Ministry of the Interior's implementation of the Registry System of Human Trafficking Statistics, it will be easier to collect information in order to reduce the exploitation suffered by women and minors.

"While there is a lot of legislation in Europe to punish this crime, Peru shows extreme social tolerance toward these situations of gender discrimination, which usually end in crimes," said Sassieta. □

"There is a custom of turning over or receiving children or youths whose parents can't take care of them, who fall into the hands of human traffickers."

— Tammy Quintanilla Zapata

“Parties have to be more creative in identifying women candidates”

Three decades have passed since democracy began taking solid root throughout Latin America. One element of the “democratic wave” has been the struggle by women to gain an equal political foothold. Have they succeeded? “Yes and no,” says **Kristen Sample**, co-author of a recent study of women in politics in Latin America. “There’s a long way to go.”

Sample, who is the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance’s senior program officer for the Andean Region and for gender issues, spoke with *LATINAMERICA PRESS* correspondent **Barbara Fraser** about how far women have come and the challenges ahead.



Kristen Sample

representative posts, like mayor or regional president, where the numbers are abysmally low. Then there are countries like Brazil, where the numbers are low across the board, where only 8 percent of Congress members are women.

Why is there such disparity?

For Parliament or a municipal or regional council, a political party has to present [a list of] a number of candidates per district, and they usually include women. And the women usually do fairly well. In a winner-take-all race, like mayor or regional president, parties aren’t willing to “risk” that one position on a woman candidate. Only 5 percent of mayoral candidates in Peru are women — that’s only one of every 20 candidates.

There are also huge discrepancies between countries. Argentina and Brazil both have quota laws, but more than 38 percent of Argentina’s parliamentary seats, and only 8 percent of Brazil’s, are held by women.

If quota laws aren’t enough, what more must be done?

There are three steps. First, make sure women are able to participate and want to run. Second, you have to get political parties to include women on their lists, which is a long-term process, trying to make political parties more gender-equity friendly. And third, another long-term process, working with the electorate, so they elect women for mayors or regional president.

How can parties become more gender-equity friendly?

Political parties face a lot of challenges, not just when it comes to reaching out to women, but also in connecting with young people, indigenous people and excluded groups in general. Parties have to be more proactive and creative in identifying potential women candidates. Women are leaders in social and community service in the areas where they work. Women make up 50 percent of universities. Women are making major breakthroughs in all sectors, and yet it seems that political parties are one of the last holdouts.

Do women want to be candidates?

It’s a Catch-22. Political parties say they don’t have enough women to fill the lists, but they’re not making their parties more women-friendly. A woman might be a political party member her whole adult life, but not be considered to be a candidate. When making their candidate lists, parties often don’t look at their most loyal members; they look at women who are famous in other spheres. In Ecuador, you have the case of famous beauty queens on candidate lists. In Peru, you have volleyball players or people who are famous as radio personalities.

When a woman does become a candidate, what obstacles does she face?

It’s very difficult for women to get the same level of media coverage [as men]. In Peru, men spend 4.6 times more on political advertising than women. Women in general have fewer resources than men in Latin America, and it is more difficult psychologically for a woman to use the money for herself and her campaign than for her family. It’s difficult for women to fund raise and ask men for money. There are a lot of traditional cultural norms that make it difficult for women to raise money. □

Four women have been elected president in Latin America. Is that a milestone?

If you consider the history of Latin American elections, four is not a big number. What’s interesting is that two of them [presidents Michele Bachelet in Chile and Cristina Fernández in Argentina] have taken office within the last two years. We’ve also seen a lot of high-profile women candidates who didn’t get elected, but who were serious contenders.

What are the criteria for determining how much progress women have made?

If we look at numbers, we’d have to say there’s qualified success. In some countries, in some political spheres, we see significantly greater numbers of women in politics. In Argentina, Costa Rica or even Peru, in posts where there are a number of representatives, like Parliament or local or regional councils, we see increasing numbers of women — numbers above 30 percent in some places, and near parity of 50 percent in Costa Rica.

But there are other cases in the same countries, of single-

LATIN AMERICA				
Countries with quota laws and the results in the lower houses of Congress				
Country	Year Approved	Current quota (%)	Lower house seats held by women before law (%)	Lower house seats currently held by women (%)
Argentina	1991	30 (L & U)	6	38.3
Bolivia	1997	30 (L) 25 (U)	11	16.9
Brazil	1997	30 (L)	7	8.8
Costa Rica	1996	40	14	36.8
Ecuador	1997	50*	4	26
Honduras	2000	30	9.4	23.4
Mexico	1996	30 (L & U)	17	22.6
Panama	1997	30	8	15.3
Paraguay	1996	20 (L & U)	3	10
Peru	1997	30	11	29.2
Dom. Rep.	1997	33	12	19.7

L: Lower house; U: Upper house
 * (2006 elections)

Source: *30 Years of Democracy: Riding the Wave? Women’s Political Participation in Latin America*, IDEA International, 2008, available at <http://www.idea.int/publications>.

Biofuels jeopardize future



OLMO CALVO RODRIGUEZ/SUBS.COOP

Soy plantations are eating up Argentina's arable land.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

Latinamerica Press

Biofuels: Are they viable?

Massive biofuel production may put region's food security at risk.

The United States and European Union have set their sights on Latin America to help feed their voracious appetite for biofuels as these countries try to reduce their use of fossil fuels. But rarely does either side of the equation look at the negative impacts that the massive production of these fuels — produced from food, usually — has on a social level, or the threats it poses to biodiversity.

As a signatory of the Kyoto Protocol — which obligates governments to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2 percent between 2008 and 2012 — the European Union intends to reduce its use of fossil fuels by 5.75 percent by 2010 and by 10 percent by 2020, replacing them with biofuels.

According to the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (OCED), to substitute 10 percent of the European Union's current fossil fuel demand, 70 percent of the region's farmland must be dedicated to fossil fuels. Germany is Europe's largest biofuel producer (rapeseed and sunflower seed oils), with a production of 2 billion liters a year. But this only covers 2 percent of the country's fuel consumption. Currently, 10 percent of Germany's farmland is dedicated to biofuel crop production. So the region has turned to biofuel exports from the South's countries, such as Brazil, Colombia and Nicaragua.

As international oil prices climbed above US\$100 a barrel, the United States sees ethanol — corn-based alcohol fuel — as a welcomed alternative to reduce the country's dependence on crude without reducing its energy consumption. Ethanol production in the United States, which is also the world's largest producer, comprises 4 percent of its national fuel consumption. President George W. Bush intends to raise that proportion to 20 percent by 2017.

But like Europe, the United States does not have sufficient agricultural lands to produce enough corn and soy for its biofuel goals.

"This means that if all of the country's corn harvest was used to make ethanol, it would displace 12 percent of our gas; all of our soybeans would displace about 6 percent of the gas," Brian Tokar wrote in a 2006 article in the US magazine *Counter-Punch*.

From here, the United States has turned to Brazil, which has more than three decades' experience producing ethanol from sugar cane. The United States and Brazil make up 70 percent of the world's ethanol production. In March 2007 the US and Brazilian governments signed a bilateral cooperation agreement to create an international market for this

alcohol-based fuel. An increased demand would require production increases in Central American, Caribbean and African countries.

Meeting the demands of "El Norte"

Some Latin American and Caribbean governments are eager for the creation of an open ethanol market, and view it as an opportunity to have new energy exportation that generates jobs, attracts investment to rural areas and strengthens economic ties with the United States and Europe.

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Paraguay all have policies in place to help move this trend along.

Also, keeping in line with the Kyoto Protocol, these and other countries in the region have established the obligatory use of a percentage of biofuels in their markets. In Peru, starting on Jan. 1, 2009, 2 percent parts biofuel must be mixed with diesel fuel, a percentage that will increase to 5 percent in 2011, creating an internal demand for biofuels.

The annual sugar cane ethanol production in Brazil, which is currently 15 billion liters, is expected to triple by 2016, based mainly on foreign demand.

But Brazil has a great advantage: the cost of biofuel production is a third less than in the United States and half of the cost in the European Union, according to the study "Opportunities and Risks in Bioenergy," by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2007.

In February of that year, Nicaragua entered the exclusive list of ethanol exporting countries by making its first shipment of the fuel to the European market of 3 million liters. It was worth around \$3 million.

In Peru, Maple Energy has one of the most ambitious ethanol projects after Brazil. The Dallas, Texas-based company plans to grow sugar cane for ethanol production in the important farming department of Piura, on Peru's northern coast. It says it plans to farm some 8,000 hectares (20,000 acres) and is planning to export it to the United States and Europe as early as 2009.

Threats abound

"Even though this is presented as an opportunity for the economies of the South, reality has shown that monoculture for biofuels, such as palm oil, soy, sugar cane and corn, creates major destruction to the biodiversity and the livelihood of the rural population, and this undermines food security even more and causes serious impacts on water, soil and the regional climate," some 200 representatives of social movements and nongovernmental organizations said in a letter to the European Union in January of last year.

Many activists, farmers and environmentalists have warned about the threats that biofuels represent for not only the environment, but the populations of the poorest countries.

"The big problem with producing ethanol on the coast [of Peru] is that its lands and water are limited. To dedicate a great part of these lands to this kind of crop implies displacing the small-scale farmers. Sugar cane crops need a lot of water," said Peruvian economist Pedro Francke in an interview for the daily *La República*.

One hectare of palm oil consumes at least 4,753 liters of water. In one year, more than 300,000 hectares (741,000 acres) of palm in Colombia will have consumed 525 billion liters, according to the magazine *Biodiversidad, Sustento y Culturas*. "That water could supply half the population of Colombia for 50 days instead of destining it to feed cars," the article added.

Numerous studies have found that biofuels can be much more contaminating than hydrocarbons and could require much more energy to produce than the energy they provide when used.

Ethanol made from pastures in the United States produces 50 percent more greenhouse gases than gasoline, according to a study published in the US magazine *Science*. Ethanol produced with corn requires 29 percent more energy from fossil fuels than the energy it produces; biofuels produced with soy require 27 percent more and biofuel from sunflower seed oil requires 118 percent more.

For the production of biofuels to be profitable, intensive agricultural methods, including heavy fumigation and fertilization, are necessary. Large-scale production requires vast swaths of land, which is causing a displace-

"Food products will increase between 20 and 50 percent in the next 10 years because of the growth of the biofuel industry."

— OCED-FAO study



Workers on a sugar cane plantation collect next year's harvest in Brazil.

ment of food crops for massive monoculture. Deforestation is also a direct effect.

International ecological organization Greenpeace has accused the German government of destroying native forests in Argentina for the farming of soy for biofuel. According to a report it presented in early April, a quarter of Argentina's biofuel exports were sent to the European Union — the rest went to the United States, which resold some of it to Europe, mainly to Germany.

Science says for biofuels to compensate for the emissions of greenhouse gases produced by the deforestation in the Amazon, they will need to be consumed for 319 years.

Greenpeace proposes the establishment of a quality standard that requires the study of a biofuel's life cycle to determine whether it generates a reduction in greenhouse gases by a minimum of 60 percent compared with the fuel it is replacing.

The increased use of food for the production of fuel is also driving up food costs as it has become a raw material. Such has been the case with the staple crop of corn in Guatemala and Mexico.

Food products, particularly grains and milk products, will increase between 20 and 50 percent in the next 10 years because of the growth of the biofuel industry, said a 2007 OCED-FAO study.

The production of biofuels competes with the production of food, creating a threat to the food sovereignty for the region's populations. Also, an increased production of biofuels translates to more production of transgenic soy and corn.

Reducing demand for fuels

Some sectors have warned about the risks that the massive production of biofuels poses to the environment and the population's well being.

"Biofuels can become part of the solution on a local scale," said international organization Friends of the Earth, referring to the potential re-use of used oil or the use of certain crops when sustainability criteria are met. "But it doesn't make sense if it is not within a proposal based on the reduction of the demand for fuel."

To achieve this, a reduction in energy consumption is required, a stop to the consumerist lifestyle, the promotion of public transportation. Agriculture will need to be oriented toward the internal market and local ecological agriculture must be developed. Furthermore, sustainable economic development on an environmental and social level must be fostered. □

USEFUL WEB SITES

Americas Program <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/4558>
Biofuelwatch <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk>
CounterPunch <http://www.counterpunch.org/tokar11012006.html>
GRAIN <http://www.grain.org/seedling/>
World Rainforest Movement <http://www.wrm.org.uy/>

Leading in ethanol production

Country touts itself as top biofuels producer.

President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso, in his visit to Brazil in March to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, promoted joint action in diverse issues of global interest, such as the fight against warming brought on by greenhouse gases.

“With Brazil’s leadership role on biofuels, we are working together to guarantee that biofuels are sustainable, good for the environment, good for reducing greenhouse gases and, therefore, to guarantee the quality of life on our planet,” Barroso said.

Barroso’s visit to discuss a possible association between Brazil and Europe for biofuels, among other things, is just one of the various actions taken by the Brazilian government to promote the country’s conversion into a world power in the sector, beginning with ethanol — a renewable biofuel that Brazil is already a leader of worldwide.

Indeed, Brazil does not lack the necessary conditions to increase its biofuel production. With plenty of available farmland, a favorable climate and an abundance of water — home to 12.5 percent of the world’s reserves of freshwater (*LP, Oct. 31, 2007*) — the country can easily increase production and contribute to the international effort to prevent and mitigate global warming by replacing other fuels that create greenhouse gases.

Biofuels are sources of renewable energy, produced by cultivating crops like sugar cane, oleaginous plants and forest biomass, as well as other sources of organic material. They can be used independently or together with conventional fuels, such as biodiesel and ethanol.

Three decades of experience

Brazil leads the world in the production of ethanol from sugar cane, partly due to its advanced infrastructure that started up in the 1970s (*LP, May 2, 2007*). Two years after the 1973 energy crisis, in which fuel prices rocketed, the military government (1964-85) launched a nationwide program to promote the production of anhydrous alcohol made from sugar cane that could increasingly be added to gasoline, as well as hydrated ethyl alcohol (or ethanol) to be used in vehicles with motors equipped to use it.

In 1975, the alcohol production in Brazil reached 700 million liters. More than three decades later, the country now produces more than 15 billion liters annually out of the 25 billion liters used annually for energy all over the world in a current pool of 350 alcohol factories, the number of which is growing.

Sugar cane derivatives already represent

nearly 14 percent of Brazilian energy and 17 percent of the fuels used for vehicles, versus 54.5 percent of diesel petrol — the most common for trucks — and 25 percent pure gasoline. The three remaining percent is natural gas for vehicles.

Likewise, Brazil has developed a flexible fuel technology that allows a vehicle to use both gasoline and ethanol. According to the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers, cars with this technology represented 53 percent of sales in Brazil in 2005.

The spectacular increase in ethanol production is, among other factors, due to the expansion of areas where sugar cane is planted. There are currently more than 6 million hectares (15 million acres) of sugar cane planted in the country. Almost two-thirds are in the state of São Paulo, where most ethanol factories are also located.

Environment and food security

However, there is a fear that the increasing expansion of land dedicated to growing sugar cane in other Brazilian states could lead to deforestation of native forests or the substitution of areas originally used to raise food crops.

“If it were done correctly, there wouldn’t be any problems with raising sugar cane. Brazil produces a lot of food; but there isn’t enough purchasing power and for that reason it’s fundamental to extend social policies that generate more income and reduce inequality,” claimed Evaristo Eduardo Miranda, head of Embrapa Satellite Monitoring of the state-run Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation.

According to Miranda, one of the ethanol experts in the country, what’s lacking in Brazil is “greater coordination and articulation” of sustainable ethanol expansion policies. If this occurred in a planned manner, the country could easily be a great power in renewable energy, contributing to the global effort to reduce greenhouse gases. Miranda stresses that Brazil has 200 million hectares (494 million acres) of pasture, where sugar cane farming is expanding.

But all the care taken cannot be exaggerated, environmentalists and other societal groups say. Town councilor Euclides Buzetto, of the ruling Worker’s Party, considers it fundamental, for example, to finish with the practice of burning, still commonly used on sugar cane plantations to facilitate the harvest.

“We must be insistent with the government so that it signs agreements with all the factories, so that they make a commitment to sustainable agriculture without increasing burnings that are so damaging to the environment and human beings. And, additionally, so that they reserve a great percentage of the sugar cane area for the farming of basic cereals in order to feed our people, with accessible prices, as has been happening in recent years,” says a Buzetto, town councilor from the city of Piracicaba in São Paulo’s interior, one of the principal producers of ethanol and other biofuels in Brazil. □

“With Brazil’s leadership role on biofuels, we are working together to guarantee that biofuels are sustainable, good for the environment.”

— José Manuel Durão Barroso

Principal crops used to produce biofuel in Latin America and the Caribbean

- Sugar cane (bioethanol)
- Soy (biodiesel)

Also used:

- Palm oil, corn, rapeseed oil, sunflower seed oil, sorghum, wheat, tapioca, among others.

ARGENTINA

Hernán Scandizzo in Buenos Aires

Biofuels take over

Exponential growth of soy production aimed to satisfy foreign demand.

"The external demand of biodiesel is going to generate strong pressure for soy to take over the land surface destined to other food crops," María Eugenia Testa of Greenpeace Argentina, wrote in the *Página/12* newspaper.

She says this trend will cause a reduction in native forests and a replacement of other crops because soy is so profitable.

The statistics back her up. In 1997, 11 million tons of soy were grown on 6 million hectares. Ten years later 47 million metric tons of soy were grown on 16.6 million hectares.

Argentina has become the world's second-largest soy producer after the United States, and the world's top soy oil exporter — the oil-producing crop comprises already 60 percent of the country's agricultural production, displacing livestock farming and replacing wheat, corn, sunflower, lentil and peas, among other crops.

In 2006, Argentina exported 4,958 tons of biofuel valued at US\$4.5 million, while in 2007 319,093 tons were exported totaling \$268 million.

According to the Argentine Biofuels and Hydrogen Association, the eight companies that export biodiesel have a production capacity of 600,000 metric tons a year. Seven new plants will begin producing as well this year, increasing the capacity to 1.7 million tons. Exports in 2008 are estimated to total 1.1 million tons.

The breakneck growth of biofuel production is not just based on external demand; internal needs are also pressing. A May 2006 law gives biofuel producers tax incentives and establishes that starting in 2010 the gasoil sold in the country will have a minimum 5 percent natural or "bio" component.

- To fill a car's 50-liter tank with biofuel, 200 kilograms of corn is needed, an amount that can feed a person for a year.

- Some 10 hectares (24.7 acres) of food producing land destined for subsistence crops can employ seven to 10 farmers, while the same area used for sugar cane employs only one person.

— Jean Ziegler, *UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*

Sugar cane and jatropha

Soy is not the only crop used for biofuels. In the north-central province of Tucumán, ethanol is produced with sugar cane. Along El Impenetrable, a 40,000-square-kilometer (15,000-square-mile) dense forest in the northeastern Chaco province, the jatropha, a brush plant with medicinal properties native to Central America whose seeds can produce oil, is promoted by entrepreneurs, with government backing, as an alternative to produce "environmentally-friendly fuels" and create jobs in indigenous communities.

The agroindustry also is aiming at Patagonia. Investors eye its vast areas of land, plenty of water resources, and Atlantic Ocean ports.

In the Negro River valley, where fruit and vegetable products are traditionally grown in irrigated lands, farming businesses are evaluating whether to start biofuel crop cultivation, including soy, rapeseed and safflower.

The government of the Chubut province last year invested in studies to produce biofuel from algae.

Forests lost

According to Greenpeace Argentina, "in the last nine years, more than 2 million hectares of forests have disappeared in the hands of agricultural businesses especially driven by soy."

In December 2007, after several postponements in Congress — under pressure from soy producers' lobbyists — an environmental protection law was approved to preserve native forests. The law set a 1-year limit for provinces where the natural resources are found to determine which areas of the land can be used in agriculture, livestock farming, protective areas and others, a step that must precede the authorization for new land clearings.

The struggle to conserve native forests had two high points last year: the determination of the Wichí community in the northwestern Salta province to stop the destruction of their lands, and the health and food crisis that plagued the Chaco province and killed 21 members of the Toba-Qom people, according to the local Nelson Mandela Center, a human rights organization.

The advance of the soy plantations into the Chaco sped up slash and burning in El Impenetrable forest, which is an important food growing and medicine zone for the Toba-Qom community. It pushed out crops such as cotton, whose harvest was a source of income for indigenous families.

Big agro-businesses also pushed out indigenous and *campesino* communities from the central and northern provinces in the country at a greater pace. The trend triggered the passage of a law in November 2006 that banned evictions of indigenous people for four years, during which time there should be a land regularization with the participation of the affected communities.

Both laws brought temporary relief but the question remains of what will happen when their validity periods expire. □

"In the last nine years, more than 2 million hectares of forests have disappeared in the hands of agricultural businesses especially driven by soy."

— Greenpeace Argentina

Farmers declare one-month truce

Strike gives way to negotiations with government.

Thousands of farmers meeting in an assembly April 2 decided to call off a three-week farm strike involving roadblocks around the country that have caused food shortages in cities, and declared a truce to continue talks with the government.

Some 20,000 farmers and their families, holding Argentine flags and signs with the names of their towns, gathered in Gualeguaychu in the province of Entre Rios, north of Buenos Aires.

"We have suspended the strike for no more than 30 days," said Mario Llambías, president of the Confederaciones Rurales Argentinas, one of the four rural associations of small, medium and large agricultural producers who took part in the protests. His organization along with the Inter-Cooperative Agricultural Federation, the Rural Association and the Argentine Agrarian Federation, represent some 290,000 farmers.

The assembly followed a very different rally by supporters of the government of President Cristina Fernández, in the Plaza de Mayo outside of the seat of government in Buenos Aires. Addressing a crowd of as many as 200,000 supporters, according to police estimates, the president called for support for the measure that sparked the conflict in the first place: the hike on soy and sunflower export taxes.

"I'm asking you to help me continue fighting for justice, for jobs," she said, urging the farmers to be a part of a business sector that "adds value to production with more and better work, with education as an instrument of social balance, because I can't do it alone."

Redistributing income?

On March 11, the government announced an increase on soy export taxes from 35 to 44 percent and on sunflower export taxes from 39 to 41 percent, although the sliding scale tax will vary as international prices rise or drop.

The government states that it is a redistributive measure imposed to extraordinary revenues due to the high prices of these crops in the international market, and that the aim is to promote other crops. The treasury, however, is receiving already almost half of the US\$24 billion a year these activities yield.

For Néstor Scibona, a columnist at the *La Nación* newspaper, more than a measure for social redistribution, the hike was the government's way of stashing money away to pay off the country's public debt and to pay for the importation of heavy crude, and "feed a bottomless pit of subsidies that are used to camouflage the energy deficit."

The decision outraged farmers who de-

manded incentives such as subsidies and loans. Small, medium and large producers of grains, milk, beef and other products began to stage roadblocks at 400 different points around the country to keep trucks from delivering their shipments of food to the cities, where supermarket shelves began to empty and some food manufacturers had to give their workers early vacations.

Two weeks into the strike, middle-class demonstrators spontaneously took to the streets to bang pots and pans in support of the farmers and in opposition to the Fernández administration.

Cities around Argentina were left with major food shortages. Millions of gallons of milk and tons of tomatoes, carrots, bananas and oranges spoiled on trucks. Meat disappeared from supermarkets and millions of small chickens had to be slaughtered.

Concentration of land

Local reports say that behind the conflict is the increasing concentration of land in the hands of a few — major landowners and large corporations — and the trend toward monoculture (*LP, June 2, 2004*). Twenty percent of the country's 84,000 soy producers hold 80 percent of the crops, and of the 30 million hectares (74 million acres) of arable land in the country, half is used for growing this oleaginous crop. Ninety-five percent of Argentine soy is exported.

In an effort to appease the farmers, the government on March 31 offered a package of measures to small farmers, such as a rebate on the export tax and compensation for transport costs. But the traffic blockades stayed in place till Wednesday, when the farmers agreed on a month-long truce.

Daniilo Lima, a political analyst and journalist at *El Diario* daily from Entre Rios, says that in reality the new tax puts a ceiling on the farmers' profits. "Since the costs are not going to stop going up — seeds, taxes, fertilizers, agrochemicals, gasoil — small and medium farmers have no other option but to rent out their land, and after, sell it to a large-scale farmer. A genuine producer is lost, then, and the land becomes concentrated in fewer hands."

The farmers who met in Gualeguaychú — a city that led massive protests against a cellulose pulp plant in the neighboring Uruguayan city of Fray Bentos (*LP, Aug. 10, 2005 and June 14, 2006*) — announced that they would give the government until May 2 to discuss their agenda.

"We want solutions, not promises," Llambías said. "We don't want to stay quiet; we're going to continue pressuring and searching for solutions. We don't want 30 days to go by to return empty-handed."

The strike caused about US\$2 billion in damages, according to Argentine business groups. □

PERU

Death squad members convicted. Four former military officials, who were members of the Colina death squad, were sentenced to between 15 and 35 years in prison for the 1992 massacre of nine students and a professor in La Cantuta University, east of Lima.

Retired Gen. Julio Salazar, the former head of the National Intelligence Service, received a 35-year sentence for murder and "forced disappearance," while the others — Fernando Lecca, José Alarcón and Orlando Vera — were each given 15 years for their role in the kidnapping, torture and murder of the 10 individuals. The bodies of the students and their professor were incinerated.

Human rights groups and victims' relatives called the ruling "historic" and said that it set a precedent for the trial of ex-President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000). The former leader is facing up to 30 years in prison in a separate trial for allegedly giving the Colina group the green light for the 1992 massacre and another in which 15 people were killed in 1991 (*LP, Feb. 6, 2008*).

Miguel Jugo, executive director at human rights organization APRODEH, said that the sentence "recognized that human rights violations were not committed in an isolated way, but rather, in a systematic and permanent form" by Fujimori's government. —*LP*.

- A criminal court in **Argentina** convicted María Cristina Gómez and Osvaldo Rivas on April 4 to eight and seven years in prison, respectively, for abducting and concealing María Eugenia Sampallo Barragán, the daughter of a couple who were disappeared shortly after her birth 1978. Sampallo was the first child of disappeared parents who brought a suit against her adoptive mother and father.

- Family violence in La Paz, **Bolivia** last year increased 10 percent over the year before. The capital's Family Protection Brigade attended to 13,829 cases of violence last year.

- The government of **Brazil** announced in late March that it would resume construction on a rocket and satellite launching tower in its Alcântara Space Center, in the northern state of Maranhão. The project is estimated to cost US\$17.6 million.

- Four senators and a lower-house legislator were arrested in **Colombia** in early April for alleged ties to paramilitary groups. With the detention of Luis Fernando Velasco, Miguel Pinedo Vidal, Guillermo Gaviria, Humberto Builes and Alonso de Jesús Ramírez, there are now 28 legislators in police custody — most allied to President Álvaro Uribe — for suspected ties to the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).

- A court-appointed specialist recommended to a court in **Ecuador** that US oil company Chevron (formerly ChevronTexaco) should pay some US\$16 billion in damages for environmental and health damages, and other offenses, for when Texaco operated there between 1972 and 1990. The company has been on trial in the city of Lago Agrio since 2003.

BOLIVIA
Martin Garat in La Paz

Corruption: A chronic problem?

Embezzlement and misappropriation of funds commonplace in public and private administration.

"In Bolivia, corruption is systemic. There is a tendency to 'cheat' in all activities inside and outside the state," explained Guadalupe Cajías, former presidential delegate in the fight against corruption and current representative for the Citizens Anti-Corruption Movement (MCA, for its initials in Spanish).

The examples of "cheating" are infinite and often surprising.

"In the Social Sciences Faculty in the public university in La Paz [Universidad Mayor de San Andrés] US\$500,000 were embezzled. Those guilty were people who supposedly had revolutionary values. But misappropriation of funds takes place even in activities like neighborhood boards, for example. The members contribute money but no one demands that the board president be accountable. In this way, the president can cash in thanks to his position," Cajías said.

The payment of bribes in public administration, schools and universities is also common.

"There are mothers in El Alto [the poorest city in Bolivia, close to La Paz] that bribe teachers so that their children pass their exams in schools where students are trained to teach primary education. In universities, there are professors who charge students to be able to pass and even ask for sexual favors from female students," added Cajías.

Influence peddling

Other common types of corruption are nepotism and influence peddling. Due to relationships with relatives, friendships or political affinity, people who lack the necessary requisites get positions in public administration. Currently, employees of the state oil company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB, for its initials in Spanish) claim that organizations with ties to the government have "places" in the company. According to one of the employees supporting this claim, a gas station was forced to close two days after its inauguration because the workers recently hired lacked the technical profile required and mixed gasoline with water and diesel.

However, it is not always easy to determine what's corrupt and what's not.

"In the small altiplano municipalities, the mayors often ask themselves, 'Why not hire my cousin if he's the only person I trust?' In a small town in the Amazon, the mayor bought bricks for the municipality from his own brick factory. We told him that this was not OK. Later we found out that the mayor's factory was the only one in the region. Bolivia is a small country and we all know each other. Here,

there is no anonymity," Cajías explained.

According to the former presidential delegate, there are various factors in society that facilitate and even generate corruption.

"We ask the state to solve our problems, but at the same time we see the state as something strange to us. Stealing from the state is not perceived as stealing from society, from everyone else," the former presidential delegate says. "And loyalty to one's friends and relatives is also an obstacle in the fight against corruption. The one who denounces it is considered a traitor."

In 2006, the Vice Ministry of Transparency and Fight against Corruption was created, having been initiated by President Evo Morales, who stressed the need to combat corruption as one of his principle campaign platforms.

Vice Minister Nardy Suño is brusque when possible corruption within the heart of the government is mentioned. "I have a very clear mandate from the president to report corruption. If a public employee or a member of the Movement Toward Socialism [MAS, official party] is involved, the report is even more important because that individual has betrayed the process of change in the country," she said.

Among other measures, Suño plans to generate social control over public administration. The Vice Minister gives the example of work carried out in the body responsible for the highway system.

"We invited social and economic players to work together," she said, referring to the construction and transportation chambers, and *campesino* organizations. "Together they reached agreements for the concessions of road building to private companies in a transparent way. There was effective social control."

"The crimes are no longer covered up; they're reported," she added.

The minister says that the vice ministry is investigating 43 cases involving officials in the current administration.

But Cajías does not share Suño's optimism.

"The president is sincerely convinced of the importance of this issue," Cajías said. "But in lower levels [of government], the internal control fails."

In previous governments the comptroller's office had a highly technical background, according to Cajías, but she suspects that now the staff is hired based on "friendliness" and political affiliation. "The new officials don't receive training in anti-corruption."

To change the values of a society is a complicated task, anti-corruption network member, Flavia Kantuta, says.

"I believe that the change is in the new generations. Children and adolescents can be taught today not to be corrupt in the future. But I believe it is very difficult to change the mentality of adults." □

Losing the HIV battle

Remote areas most affected by centralization of medical attention.

Using a pseudonym, Delia told of the day she went to the hospital with her husband and her voice broke, filling with pain and indignation. The doctor said her husband had only 20 days to live and that she and her children would also soon die of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Six years after her husband's passing, she continues to live, enjoying every minute with her children.

According to official statistics, there are around 100,000 people living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), or AIDS in Guatemala, which causes more than 4,000 deaths each year — roughly the same number of deaths caused by violence in the country.

As in other Central American countries, there are no statistics on the epidemic's spread beyond the capital. However, available data indicates the rise in persons living with HIV or AIDS (PLHA) among the indigenous population.

The "2006 AIDS Epidemic Update," from the United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), reports that in 2004, 74 percent of AIDS cases were found in the *mestizo* population and 22 percent in indigenous. But in 2007 — just one year later — the *mestizos* account for 69 percent and indigenous for 28 percent.

Great difficulties

Delia lives in the southwestern Retalhuleu department, more than four hours from the capital. She belongs to a mutual support group and explains that the greatest difficulty is buying bus tickets so that PLHA can go to a hospital for consultations or to receive anti-retroviral medication found in the capital Guatemala City, in Coatepeque or north of Retalhuleu in Quetzaltenango — all very far from where they live.

"In the group, what we do is have quick raffles for those who need it, since there are a lot of people in extreme poverty. There are patients who get there to sleep the night before and go to their appointment in the early morning, standing in line starting at three in the morning," said Delia.

But this is not only a problem for the group in Retalhuleu. Inhabitants of Petén, in the far northeast, who come from families with an income of less than US\$100 per month, have

to spend around \$130 in order to go to a doctor appointment.

Lídice López Tocón, from the Asociación Agua Buena, a Central America association for the right to antiretroviral treatment, explains there are various barriers that hinder access to antiretroviral treatment in Guatemala, including late diagnoses.

Furthermore, there are only 16 establishments that offer AIDS testing. Medical treatment after testing is more centralized and very difficult for people to access. In addition to high transportation, housing and food costs, AIDS patients suffer discrimination by others in society, especially by health personnel. The wide range of indigenous languages also presents a barrier for the populations who don't speak Spanish.

Lack of information and prevention

Juan Alberto Cutz, of the Research, Development and Integral Education Association, claims that what most affects the rural population is the lack of information.

"There is no prevention program directed at these communities. It is difficult to find any information on health, whatever it may be, which is why these towns know very little about what HIV is," he said. "Furthermore, when someone gets an opportunistic disease, they don't pay attention to it and don't go to a health center because they are generally treated with traditional medicine, and only when this is unsuccessful, they go to a health center. In some cases, when they manage to reach a hospital, they are already in the AIDS stage. Currently there are more than 300 people receiving medicine in the Quetzaltenango clinic — 50 percent come from urban areas and 50 from rural areas."

Dee Smith, coordinator for the Life Project in Coatepeque, explained that in these areas, "the government has not had a systematic plan to strengthen health centers' assistance to people with HIV in order to reduce the distance between services and people; nor is there a real projection of demand for medicine in remote areas. Furthermore, the government doesn't want to finance the required medicine and keeps depending on the Global Fund [to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria], to avoid assuming more responsibility."

Though the state has implemented some responses and actions, these meager efforts are comparable to putting out a forest fire with a glass of water. For example, of the \$12 million needed to start up the National AIDS Program, which would implement the necessary activities to see to the HIV problem in Guatemala, only \$5.6 million have been approved.

For Alma de León, president of the National Alliance Group of PLHA, "it's important to keep in mind that though there are funds for [medical] attention, those invested in health directed at the issue of HIV/AIDS — given by the Health Ministry, Global Fund and the Guatemalan Institute for Social Security — only reach 41 percent national coverage. Meanwhile, people keep dying because there's no way to get attention. And in order to achieve something, we need a government committed to this issue." □



"Give people with HIV a hand," reads a t-shirt during a march in Guatemala City.

HAITI

Inter Press Service

United Nations jolted by protests

Demonstrations turned into attack against peacekeepers.

Hedi Annabi, head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), hurriedly left New York on Apr. 9, heading to the politically-troubled Caribbean nation, where more than 7,000 United Nations (UN) troops have been deployed since June 2004.

"The growing public discontent had the clear potential to undermine [UN] efforts at stabilization," he told UN Security Council delegates in New York the day before.

Last week, four people were killed in demonstrations against rising living costs. The demonstrators, in the town of Les Cayes in southern Haiti, attacked and burned shops and fired at UN peacekeepers.

While expressing "concern" over the violence in Haiti, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "deplored" the attacks against MINUSTAH personnel and facilities, as well as against the government of Haiti and private property. He also expressed his "sympathy for the suffering that the Haitian people are enduring as a result of rising food and fuel prices."

A high-level conference of international donors is scheduled to take place in the capital of Port-au-Prince on April 25.

"Stability dividend"

Annabi has urged donor countries and the private sector to work with the Haitian authorities to find creative ways to generate what he called a "stability dividend," which would provide immediate and tangible improvements in socio-economic conditions.

This, he said, should include urgent humanitarian assistance followed by long-term agricultural aid to increase crop yields.

In a 19-page report to the Security Council, Ban said it re-

mains urgent to address the immediate hardships experienced by the Haitian population, 76 percent of whom still live on less than two dollars a day.

"Weak purchasing power remains a constant preoccupation in connection with basic daily items and imported goods, which represent some 60 percent of available products on the market," the report said.

Furthermore, the recent increase in the price of such staples as flour, rice and cooking oil has led to additional suffering, while access to basic social services (health care, education and potable water) remains extremely limited.

Currently, Haiti is ranked 146 of 177 states in the human development index released annually by the United Nations Development Program. Haiti is also categorized as one of the 50 least developed countries, the poorest of the world's poor.

The UN report also points out that the government of Haiti has continued its efforts to reach out to political groups and to strengthen state institutions.

"However, the political situation remains fragile given the continued political divisions and weak state institutions, as well as the absence of any significant improvement in the difficult living conditions of much of the population," it says.

Addressing the Security Council on April 8, Annabi said while there had been some progress on institutional reform over the past six months, much more remains to be done to reach benchmarks. He said that while some 8,450 police officers were now in service, this fell far short of the 14,000 required for basic policing duties.

Annabi lauded three critical laws on the judiciary and the penal system that had been passed, but pointed out that "continued and coordinated efforts would be essential to turn these blueprints into reality."

He said the Haitian prison system was "unacceptable from security and human rights perspectives."

Annabi also told reporters that tensions between political actors and between the branches of government had occasionally threatened to escalate and to undermine public confidence.

This, he said, was dramatically illustrated by the recent shooting incident in Parliament, during a debate related to investigations into alleged spending irregularities. □

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Executive director: Raquel Gargatte Loarte

Editor-in-chief: Elsa Chanduvi Jaña
(echanduvi@comunicacionesaliadas.org)

Editors: Cecilia Remón Arnáiz, Leslie Josephs

Translator: Kelly Phenicie **Graphics editor:** William Chico Colugna

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Jr. Carlos Gonzales 252, Lima 32, Peru. (511) 242 8263

Comunicaciones Aliadas

Jr. Olavegoya 1868, Lima 11, Peru.

(511)2659014 Fax: (511)2659186

info@comunicacionesaliadas.org

www.latinamericapress.org

www.noticiasaliadas.org (in Spanish)

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