

Human survival is the only real 'rights' issue in Peru

by Luis Vásquez and Cynthia Rush

In recent months, a stream of human rights lobbyists, U.S. congressmen, State Department officials, and others have descended on Peru to complain about human rights violations. None of them has spoken about the rights of human beings who have been killed by the International Monetary Fund's economic "shock" policies; nor has anyone talked about how many millions of dollars in damages, not to mention the number of human lives, have been lost as a result of ten years of murderous activities by the Pol Pot-like terrorists of Shining Path. These violations are of no concern to the Washington crowd.

On the contrary, according to a report in the daily *La República* Nov. 18, the executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Americas Watch has written a letter to Shining Path's top leader Abimael Guzmán, asking him to report on human rights violations committed by Peru's Armed Forces. When the Organization of American States Human Rights Commission visited Peru in late October, the commission made it a top priority to meet with jailed terrorists and drug kingpins to document their complaints against the Army. And, on Nov. 18, Amnesty International put out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* characterizing Peru's Armed Forces as the world's worst violator of human rights.

At bottom, the numerous delegations which have traveled to Peru have gone on behalf of one thing only: George Bush's "new world order," whose goal is to kill off Peru's impoverished dark-skinned population, dismantle its remaining national institutions, particularly the Armed Forces, and hand power over to Shining Path. Under the circumstances of Peru's devastating economic crisis, coupled with Shining Path's murderous rampages, and a spreading cholera epidemic, the criminal behavior of these visiting groups can be explained only from the standpoint of this objective.

Peru has been 'Africanized'

In April 1991, the Swedish Radda Barden Foundation published a report titled *The August 1990 Shock*, a reference to the brutal austerity measures imposed by President Alberto Fujimori. The report noted that, when the government imposed its "anti-inflationary" measures, "the Peruvian population was already among the planet's poorest." By the end of 1990, "Peru was approaching a socio-economic situation more resembling the Fourth World African countries, than

the rest of the Latin American nations." Before Fujimori's "shock treatment," living standards had fallen to the levels of the 1950s, while under- and unemployment had hit record levels. Average income couldn't purchase even half of the family market basket, which in March 1991 cost \$500 a month.

The Radda Barden report underscores the fact that the Fujimori "reforms," which have recently been extended in even more dramatic fashion by Finance Minister Carlos Bologna, achieved what 70 austerity packages had been unable to do in the previous 15 years: Overnight, they eliminated all subsidies on most food staples and fuel, and, the report adds, "increased by between 2 and 30 times the prices of almost all items in the popular diet, accompanied by similar increases in energy, water, phone, and transportation services." Salaries, however, were only increased by 100%, since, "according to the logic of the IMF and Finance Ministry economists, inflation is caused by excess demand." The Swedish report makes the important point that "this is hard to believe in a country like Peru, where 60% of the population already had subsistence problems due to low income and few possibilities of demand."

In addition, the report explained, the government authorized the use of foreign exchange and tax revenues to pay off debt to the IMF, World Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). This was, it said, an attempt to "re-insert Peru into the international financial world with a good image for repayment, but with little compassion for its people."

The impact of these measures on Peru's manufacturing sector was dramatic. The president of the National Society of Industries reported that, while the cost of inputs such as fuel, energy, water, and phone increased between 20 and 30 times, the value of the dollar and wages only doubled.

More dramatic was what happened to the middle class and the poor, who overnight saw their already-deteriorated real income drop by 60%. A survey carried out by the Metric firm showed that "due to the [economic] shock, the poorest of population who only consumes one meal a day increased from 0.3 to 3%, that is, it increased tenfold. Families which have money for only two meals a day increased from 10 to 21%" of the total population.

After August 1990, the number of poor children in Lima who were forced to leave school to work increased by almost

a third, according to the Metric survey. From 100,000 children working in 1989, the figure rose to 190,000, according to a preliminary survey by the Labor Ministry. Statistics released by the Education Ministry showed that 40% of school-aged youth have left school to work to supplement family income. So far, in 1991, some 400,000 children have left school, and the Fujimori government's recently announced plan to privatize public education, and pass the cost on to parents or private organizations, will eliminate education for all but the wealthy. Former Education Minister Mercedes Cabanillas charged Nov. 13 that this plan obeys the dictates of such agencies as the IMF, World Bank, and IADB. "At a time when there is loss of employment, freezing of wages and jobs, is it possible for heads of households to pay tuition?" she asked.

Narco-terrorism is genocide

What does it mean when leaders of "human rights" groups go to Peru to hobnob with terrorist murderers and drug traffickers, and claim that members of the Armed Forces are worse criminals than the Shining Path terrorists? What does it mean if Peru's armed forces are destroyed?

In a statement reported in the Oct. 18 *El Comercio*, Msgr. Juan Luis Cipriani called narco-terrorism "the greatest genocide of our history, the worst of our internal wars, the greatest violation of human rights seen in Latin America in this century." In almost 10 years of Shining Path's activities, Bishop Cipriani noted, "20,000 people have died and more than 5 million have been affected by the loss of a father, a mother, or children. Over 25% of the country has been punished by a murderous and merciless terrorism."

Aside from killing—often torturing and mutilating its victims first—Shining Path has caused infrastructure damage whose monetary value is close to the amount of Peru's foreign debt, \$20 billion. It has blown up electricity towers, transportation and agricultural infrastructure, and research centers, and killed Peruvian and foreign engineers and technicians who were working to bring advanced technology to rural areas. As in Cambodia under Pol Pot, anything connected to western Christian culture is targeted by Shining Path for extermination.

The terrorists' strategy of "strategic equilibrium" is designed to cut off urban centers, especially Lima, from the rest of the country, and starve the cities into surrendering. What has prevented that from happening so far is the deployment of the Armed Forces, including creation of military-administered civic programs in the slums to feed and provide services for the poor. According to Shining Path's European spokesman, Luis Arce Borja, the group is now positioned to provoke insurrections in all major Peruvian cities, "including Lima," to begin its campaign to take power by the end of this decade.

In the climate of desperation caused by the IMF's genocidal policies and by the Fujimori government's submission

to every aspect of Bush's new world order, thousands of youth fall prey to Shining Path's ideology. A survey carried out by Peruvian intelligence services a few months ago revealed the alarming statistic that 17% of Lima's youth support the activities of narco-terrorism. For those who don't, according to a United Nations report issued last October, Shining Path uses methods of forced recruitment, terror, and indoctrination, accomplished by establishing clandestine schools for children between the ages of 5 and 10. This, the United Nations report said, "violates the most fundamental rights of the child, and threatens his very life."

Cholera: no end in sight

Apparently, judging from their backing for terrorists and the IMF, the international human rights lobby and the Bush administration think cholera too has "human rights." Radda Barden estimated that by March 1991, in Lima's metropolitan area, 90% of the families lived below the poverty line, with a monthly income equal to half of the family market basket—that is, about \$200 a month. Seventy percent of families are considered to be living in "critical" or "very critical" poverty, with an income below one-quarter of the cost of the market basket—less than \$130 a month. The government's social assistance program reaches barely 12% of the population, but at least 60% of Lima's families are in desperate need of help.

In February 1991, the first outbreak of cholera in Ibero-America occurred—not surprisingly, in Peru. To date, over 2,600 people have died, over 300,000 are infected and \$1 billion has been lost in tourism, trade, and industry. International health agencies and experts agree that only massive investment in health infrastructure, to guarantee clean, potable water, and proper sewage and sanitation systems, can prevent the catastrophe threatened not only by cholera, but by many other preventable diseases which afflict Peruvians.

An investment of \$180 million as an emergency measure could have brought the epidemic under control; but the Fujimori government didn't want to upset its arrangements with foreign bankers, so it paid the debt instead. Now, as Peru enters its summer season, it faces a new outbreak, and even more virulent strains of the disease which can kill in a matter of hours. The Nov. 11 edition of *Caretas* magazine noted "serious doubts" about the government's commitment to combatting the disease. "There are reasons to believe that the local water supply system has been an important transmission route for the epidemic in the country's main coastal cities." *Caretas* quoted one physician, Dr. Oscar Ugarte Ubilluz, who charged that, while the government adopted his plan to fight cholera, "it hasn't even been considered in the current national budget." The Health Ministry is unwilling to talk about reports of a new outbreak, but media report that officials from the ministry and the city water supply company say "the level of chlorine in potable water is insufficient to remove the bacteria which cause cholera."