Event Feedback
United Against the Water Trade

The annual Latin America Week series of campaign events came to a close in Aril with a full-day conference concentrated on the topic of the current LASC campaign – water and natural resources. The conference – held in a hotel in Smithfield – attracted a large and interested crowd who were prepared to forego their Saturday morning lie-in!

The day began with a considered introduction by RTE journalist and chairperson Diarmuid Peavoy, who put the water issue in an Irish context. The early session featured the European speakers. Giuseppe de Marzo, of Italian organisation ASUD, gave an passionate talk importance of water, reminding the auditorium that if all the world's countries were to follow a similar development path to that taken by many countries of the North, we would need five planets to have enough water. Satoko Kishomoto of the Transnational Institute put flesh on the bones with her talk on Public/Public Partnerships.

After coffee we heard from our Latin American speakers: Enrique Galan of Colombian group ECOFONDO, and Ricardo Buitron of Ecuador's Accion Ecologica. Both speakers gave details from the frontline of campaigning in each country, with Galan highlighting attempts to call a referendum in Colombia to make water a human right. Buitron for his part emphasised one concept: mobilisation.

The afternoon session began with entertainment from Brazilian drum troupe DendecomPimenta, who woke the residents of Smithfield Plaza with infectious beats.

Taking part in the Latin America Week Conference 2008 are Enrique Galan of Colombian group ECOFONDO (left), chairman Diarmuid Peavoy of RTE (centre),icardo Buitron of Ecuadorian organisation Accion Ecologica (right). (Photo by Pawel Szewczyk).

The rest of the day was given over to in-depth workshops that were extremely productive and have helped to design a campaign consensus for LASC's future efforts.

Event Feedback
Dream Fuel or Eco-nightmare?

Advocates of biofuels argue that they have the potential to slow or even stop climate change. This talk, organized by LASC and Progressio, and held at the Irish Aid Centre on June 11th, gave those in attendance the opportunity to listen to a testimony from 3 different speakers and experiences from different countries.

Camilla Moreno, a Brazilian lawyer from the NGO Terra de Direitos (a Brazilian NGO that defends social and environmental rights), provided an introduction about the world of biofuels and referred to the millions of people currently at risk due to food price hikes linked to the growth of biofuels. Camilla recounted her first hand experience of biofuel cultivation in Brazil, and the problems attached to it such as water shortages, soil erosion and deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon.

Xiomara Ventura, Progressio's Country Director in Honduras, talked about the fact that agrofuel production has already started to replace food production. Fionuala Cregan discussed her experience in Paraguay, where she visited a number of rural communities impacted by soya production, especially the impacts on livelihoods and food security, on health and human rights. Camilla finished by considering the pros and cons of a monoculture economy, and advocated for small-scale production and local consumption.

Education Update

April saw the culmination of the FETAC-certified Latin American Development Studies Course, which took place at Ballsbridge College of Further Education. The second semester proved just as interesting, but even more challenging, than the first, as participants were encouraged to put their accumulated knowledge to work. The concentration was on forms of participation in Latin American development, and once again the facilitators and topics were highly varied. Development specialists from respected NGO's and Irish Aid, together with academic experts from different universities, talked about and canvassed views on politics, social movements, campaigning, debt, responsible travel and volunteering. The response as ever was enthusiastic – and many of the students have since become involved in a Latin American campaigning.

LASC continues to offer workshops on topics related to Latin America. This year a workshop on coca and how drugs get to Ireland took place in the Talbot Centre as part of their Addiction Studies course. This provided an opportunity for the participants to think about the international aspect of drugs and to link the realities of their communities to Latin American communities. Also, as summer arrives many people are thinking of spending their holidays in Latin America, whether travelling or volunteering in different organisations. Accordingly LASC provided an opportunity to learn before leaving in its "Travelling and Volunteering in Latin America Workshop". Issues like the impact of tourism and the alternatives to mass tourism were discussed, and participants had the chance to hear first-hand experiences from people that have spent time in Latin America, to exchange tips and advice. A must-do before you go!