

Mexican Senators visit Belize to discuss energy and environment issues

by Adele Ramos

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 Mexican Senators, Eduardo Martinez of Quintana Roo and Bartlett Diaz of Puebla State, *Amandala* yesterday, ay, July 3, 2002, to brief the their visit to Belize. The two e accompanied by Mexico's idor to Belize, H.E. Arturo i. América Leal Loera, Advisor; omat Juan Manuel Herrera. rpose of the Mexican officials' elize was to meet with a number fficials, among them Valdemar of the Belize Audubon Society; atives of the Belize Alliance for ition NGO's (BACONGO); the Electricity Limited's Chief e Officer, Lynn Young; Acting inister and Minister of Natural es and Environment, Hon. rriceño; and Chair of the Public ; Commission, Dr. Gilbert

visit to Belize is critical, as is considering legislative for the energy sector which may elize. Recently, the Vicente Fox tration has proposed ation of the state-owned n Federal de Electricidad (CFE), rves 100 million Mexicans, and ze population. The Mexican s, however, vetoed the proposal. ajor consideration for the on is concerns over a power : agreement between Belize and whereby CFE sells power to the vned Belize Electricity Limited.

In March this year, the Mexican newspaper *Novedades* had reported that Ovando Martinez was calling for the revision of the contract between Belize and Mexico. Belize currently gets 25 MW of power from CFE under a contract initiated with the Government of Belize on behalf of the Belize Electricity Board (BEB) in 1991. The BEB was since divested by Government, partially in 1992 and completely in 1999.

Ovando Martinez told *Amandala* yesterday that one of the issues they had addressed on their visit to Belize was this "goodwill gesture" made to Belize a decade ago. Bartlett Diaz said that Mexico wants to ensure that the benefits accrue to the people of Belize and not to a private foreign interest - Fortis, Inc.

According to the *Novedades* reports, those opposing the agreement in Mexico complain that CFE is selling power to BEL for US\$0.06, but BEL/Fortis Inc. resells to customers for US\$ 0.174 - three times the amount.

Mexico supplies Belize with 60% of its power needs, and the contract is due to expire in 2012, by which time the 7 MW Chalillo hydro facility is expected to be up and running. Bartlett Djaz told the press, however, that Mexico would like to maintain its arrangement with Belize.

While the Senators made no specific mention of Chalillo, it is clear that the proposal for constructing Chalillo, which BEL and Government see as a means of increasing local power generation and thus decreasing dependence on Mexico, is a major factor.

In their meeting with the Belize Audubon Society (BAS), the Mexican delegation brought a number of issues to the table, according to Andrade. Speaking with *Amandala* today, Andrade said that they discussed Belize's present work to formulate an energy policy, an initiative under the aegis of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). With regards to Chalillo, issues that

concern BAS were raised, including increased public consultation on mitigation measures and open dialogue on Chalillo, as well as an independent audit every six months on the Environmental Compliance Plan, signed on April 5, 2002.

They also discussed issues surrounding protected areas in Belize, and impacts of development at Mollejón on settlements in the Vaca Plateau area.

Bartlett Diaz said that Mexico wants to work with Belize because we both have similar environments and so experience some of the same environmental problems.

The Senators, two of a total of 128, representing two of Mexico's 32 states, are both from Mexico's Opposition Party - Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Their companion, Bartlett, is head of Mexico's Commission for Constitutional Reform and Herrera is the president of the Commission of Ecology in the State of Quintana Roo.