

Nicaragua Sugar Estates/Chronic Renal Insufficiency Struggle Background

September 2009

New Haven/León Sister City Project (NHLSCP)

Since the late 1990's workers, ex-workers and their families in the states of Chinandega and León, Nicaragua have been struggling to find a solution to the growing epidemic of chronic renal insufficiency – a progressively fatal disease with no cure – affecting thousands of workers. Below is an overview of this struggle.

Timeline

- First cases of Chronic Renal Insufficiency (CRI) begin to appear in early 1990's
- NSEL lays off sugar cane workers whose creatinine levels (a CRI indicator) are elevated.
- Early 2000's worker protest in Chinandega and Managua seeking redress. Ex-workers/families set up permanent protest outside NSEL (Ingenio San Antonio) refinery in the city of Chichigalpa.
- NHLSCP Intern/Yale FES student Olivia Kaplan leads efforts to test for water contamination (a concern in nearby communities). Results indicate drinking water safe.
- In March, 2008 (with legal representation from the Center for Environmental Law - Kris Genovese) 680 ex-workers (ASOCHIVIDA) and local communities file a complaint with the International Finance Corporation/World Bank about a \$55 million loan to NSEL in 2006: The complaint states, "The complainants seek redress for injuries to their health, environment, and livelihoods resulting from the failure of the International Finance Corporation ("IFC") to comply with its Policy on Social and Environmental Sustainability and its Environmental and Social Review Procedures in its loan to NSEL." (More below)
- Summer 2008 - the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) of World Bank accepts the complaint and initiates negotiations between workers, communities, and NSEL. Interim agreement reached to provide food subsidy to affected workers/families while health study/negotiations continue.
- Spring 2009 CAO, in agreement with ASOCHIVIDA and NSEL, contracts with Boston University to perform public health study. July 2009 medical needs assessment released.
- 2009 - Estimates range from 1000 to 3000 dead from CRI.



Leonadro de Jesus Oliva Rivera (right) holding a photo of himself and one of his four brothers who recently died of CRI. As of June, 2008, (when this photo was taken) Mr. Rivera, who also has CRI, was told he had 4 months to live if he does not get dialysis. Mr. Rivera is the youngest of 5 brothers, of which 4 of the brothers, and their father, have died of CRI. He has worked at the Nicaragua Sugar Estates since he was fifteen and was diagnosed with CRI when he was 20 years old. When asked what scares him most of the disease, he said, "I don't want to leave my 9 year old son, he is too young to be without a father". Mr. Rivera was 13 years old when his father died of CRI.

From CAO Medical Needs Assessment (July 2009)

- Chronic Renal Insufficiency (CRI) is progressively fatal disease with no cure. 3500 CRI patients currently need treatment

- To receive social security in Nicaragua must work 104 consecutive weeks – cane workers seasonal - social security benefit \$50/month.
- Nutrition key to treatment, but many have no income. Serious lack of medications.
- CRI clinic in Chinandega has two doctors who work 4 days/wk and 1.5 hours per day. 40 -50 patients are seen each day about 5 minutes per patient.
- Ingenio San Antonio (NSEL) gives \$200 per month to the clinic for basic supplies.
- Hemodialysis costs \$9000 per person per year. Renal transplant costs \$52,000.
- Nicaragua per capita health care spending \$251
- Nicaraguan government health care spending per person - \$1.65 per person/year
- Peritoneal Dialysis (PD) – 20 CRI patients at Hospital Espana need PD – cost \$3-4,000 per month - Total for year for all 20 - \$840,000.

Workers earn \$100/month - usually only seasonal work - 6 months/year

Background Information of Nicaraguan Sugar Estates Limited

The Nicaraguan Sugar Estates Limited (NSEL), established in 1890, as part of the Grupo Pellas corporation. Grupo Pellas is one of Nicaragua's largest corporate entities and is involved in banking, cable television, internet provision, rum and beer production, and, of course, sugar production. NSEL is one of Nicaragua's largest sugar production companies which processes 2.5 million metric tons (2.76 tons) of sugar cane annually. According to the company website, the company currently owns 12,575 hectares (31,073 acres) and leases 2549 hectares (6298 acres) of sugar cane plantations employing thousands of workers primarily in the region of Chichigalpa, Nicaragua to plant, tend, harvest, and process the cane. Besides cane produced on NSEL-owned property, the company purchases raw cane independently produced on an additional 9430 hectares of land (23,302 acres).

Background on ASOCHIVIDA

ASOCHIVIDA is a Nicaraguan association that currently represents over 1900 former sugar cane employees of the Nicaraguan Sugar Estates Limited (NSEL) (the producer of Flor de Cana rum), who are currently suffering from Chronic Renal Insufficiency (CRI) and the widows of former NSEL employees, whose husbands have already died from CRI. (www.asochivida.org)

The 2008 IFC Complaint also raised concerns of:

- o Interference by NSEL in attempts to establish a union independent of NSEL control and associated retaliation against those workers who sought to form or join the union;
- o Impacts to indigenous Sutiaba lands from pesticide drift;
- o Depletion of groundwater as a result of NSEL's irrigation of sugarcane fields;
- o Suspected contamination of community drinking water supplies and natural water bodies with pesticide, runoff from sugarcane fields, and improper treatment and disposal of effluent from cane processing; and
- o Incarceration and/or persecution and harassment of community members, and current and former employees, who raise concerns about NSEL's activities.

For more information, contact: New Haven León Sister City Project

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The New Haven/León Sister City Project is a progressive, binational, grassroots organization that fosters a partnership between the communities of Greater New Haven, Connecticut and León, Nicaragua. Our mission is to promote social justice.