

NGO UPDATE

To foster communication among human rights organizations around the world, each issue of the Human Rights Brief features an “NGO Update.” This space was created to aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by informing others about their programs, successes, and challenges. The views of the organizations below do not necessarily reflect those of the Human Rights Brief. For information on how to submit updates for your organization, please see the instructions provided at the end of the column.

ECPAT INTERNATIONAL: END CHILD PROSTITUTION, CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL PURPOSES

www.ecpat.net

ECPAT International (ECPAT) is a global network dedicated to eliminating the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The ECPAT network has 73 groups in 67 countries, although the majority of the work is done through the International Secretariat based in Bangkok, Thailand.

ECPAT grew from a series of conferences in 1990 that focused on the issues related to commercial sexual exploitation of children. At its foundation, ECPAT stood for End Prostitution of Children in Asian Tourism, as a campaign among a coalition of organizations to raise awareness of the relevant issues and to formulate a strategy to bring about change. By 1996, ECPAT’s activity and infrastructure had dramatically grown with the founders deciding that ECPAT would become its own international NGO. ECPAT also changed its name to reflect the broader mandate and enlarged membership of the organization. The acronym is still ECPAT, but it now stands for End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking in Children for sexual purposes.

Currently, the smaller ECPAT groups are the driving force of the ECPAT network. These small groups meet every three years at the International Assembly, which is the highest decision making body of the organization. ECPAT groups are very diverse: they range

from large coalitions of NGOs to smaller groups of individuals. Some have extensive financial and personnel resources while others have limited resources and function with part-time volunteers. Other informal entities, such as ECPAT Europe, a regional grouping of Western European members, and key individuals play a significant role in the functioning of the movement.

Despite its wide diversity, the groups within the ECPAT network work toward several common objectives. Monitoring is a priority for the ECPAT network. ECPAT’s monitoring activities reinforce the work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and assist governments in living up to their commitments to children. Each year the network produces and distributes a report that monitors the implementation of the reforms adopted by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Two other broad objectives of ECPAT are combating child sex tourism and the trafficking of children. To reach this goal, ECPAT has partnered with many tourism federations and corporations to educate travelers and governments about the growing scope of the problem as well as to implement prevention campaigns. In 1993, the Universal Federation of Travel Agents’ Associations (UFTAA), the largest travel agent association in the world, in cooperation with ECPAT, pledged to combat the prostitution of children related to so-called “sex tourism,” and to give assistance to the various organizations concerned with the welfare of child victims of “sex tourism.” Many other tourist organizations, such as the World Tourism Organization (WTO), followed UFTAA’s lead.

Another mechanism ECPAT employs is research. For example, ECPAT Europe Law Enforcement Group has researched trafficking and documents the movement of children from Eastern to Western Europe. Another example is the research conducted in six Latin American countries in 2000 and 2001 by ECPAT and Casa Alianza, an honorary member of the network. The research provided an innovative methodology that can be applied elsewhere.

Ending child pornography is another objective of ECPAT. ECPAT responded early to the problems caused by the internet as a new communication tool, and together with Interpol, organized an experts meeting in 1998. Through its campaigns at the national, regional, and international levels, ECPAT furthers the notion that child pornography cannot be reduced to a question of freedom of speech. ECPAT maintains that every pornographic image of a child is evidence of that child’s sexual exploitation, and hence, evidence of a crime. In the words of Katrin Hartmann, executive director of ECPAT Switzerland, “Viewing child pornography on the Internet is neither an anonymous nor a specially hidden act . . . [U]sing Internet for child abuse purposes in one’s private home will be uncovered as crimes in public spheres.”

ECPAT also advises governments and other groups on legal issues and on policing child trafficking. ECPAT circulates information and provides expert advice on the use of extraterritorial jurisdiction to find and punish child sex offenders who commit crimes in a country other than their own. ECPAT also promotes improvements in legislation and in legal procedures as well as the introduction of special legislation where there was no such jurisdiction operating in favor of children. ECPAT national groups work with their national police forces in several countries in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation and with agreed procedures for bringing child abusers to justice. ECPAT has been influential in promoting the use of the Liaison Officer system as a method of tracking pedophile sex offenders in countries where such officers are based.

The commercial exploitation of children is an issue that goes beyond Asia and child sex tourism. ECPAT has responded to both the emerging field of child exploitation and its own success by continuing to grow and develop. What started as a networking campaign in the early 1990s has become an international NGO that approaches multiple issues from dynamic perspectives.

DEFENSA Y CONSERVACIÓN
ECOLÓGICA DE INTAG (DECOIN)
DEFENSE AND ECOLOGICAL
CONSERVATION OF INTAG

www.decoin.org

DECOIN is a grassroots, nonprofit organization, founded in 1995 by Carlos Zorrilla as part of a community response to foreign corporations attempting to mine minerals from the cloud forests in Ecuador's Intag region. DECOIN works in this region in northwestern Ecuador to conserve its unique biodiversity. Although DECOIN started primarily as an environmental organization, its efforts to protect Ecuador's biodiversity quickly led the organization to address human rights issues.

Most of DECOIN's work focuses on battling mining companies that have government-granted concessions to thousands of acres of rain forests and cloud forests in the Intag region. DECOIN bases its work on the recognition that a healthy environment is a basic human right and that the destructive nature of mining is not only an environmental threat, but also a violation of the human rights of the region's farmers and residents. DECOIN sponsors educational programs that seek to raise awareness regarding the threat of mining and the current state of mining legislation. It creates and supports economic alternatives to mining, including the Rio Intag Agroartesanal Coffee Growers Association (AACRI) as well as a number of ecotourism initiatives. Also, the organization was instrumental in getting the Intag region declared an Ecological County, the first designation of its kind in all of Ecuador.

The dispute over mining in the Intag region of Ecuador dates back to the early 1990s when a Japanese mining corporation, Bishimetals, purchased mining rights in the area. The Environmental Impact Study by Bishimetals reflected that a mining operation would result in severe deforestation and would face strong, local opposition. By 1997, community tension had risen to the point of anti-mining activists burning a Bishimetal mining camp. Eventually, due to fierce local opposition, Bishimetal pulled out of the region.

In 2002, the Ecuadorian government allegedly auctioned off mining concessions to Roque Bustante, a private dealer, who purchased the rights to 49 square kilometers for approximately US\$18,000. In July of 2004, Roque Bustante transferred the property rights to Ascendant Copper Corporation

(ACC), a Canadian mining company. Since 2004, there has been strong public opposition to the ACC mining project in the cloud forest, including letters from mayors and other public officials, and a number of petition drives.

Beyond the public awareness campaign, DECOIN and others that oppose the mining have taken legal action. In May 2003, a suit was filed in a regional civil court. The action alleged that the ACC had violated the Protocol of San Salvador, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and the American Convention on Human Rights. Additionally, the suit alleged that the Ecuadorian government's sale of the property rights violated Article 88 of the Ecuadorian Constitution. Article 88 states that any governmental decision that would impact the environment must include prior consultation with the communities affected. Although the Imbabura Civil Court ruled against the mining companies, on appeal, Ecuador's Constitutional Tribunal, in a five to four decision reversed the lower court's ruling on a procedural technicality. In 2005, DECOIN and local residents took their claim to the Organization of American State's Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. This legal action is still pending.

While DECOIN and other organizations pursue non-violent legal and public awareness campaigns, the Intag region faces growing tensions and confrontations that sometimes turn violent. In December 2005, a building related to ACC's mining project was destroyed. In October 2006, there was a police raid on the home of Carlos Zorrilla, the founder of DECOIN. On December 6, 2006, *The Washington Post* and other news agencies published photographs of ACC employees throwing stones at residents who opposed the mining projects. DECOIN and other sources allege that in addition to throwing stones, ACC employees fired guns at the locals, injuring four people.

According to DECOIN's website, on December 13, 2006, Ecuador's Ministry of Energy and Mines rejected the latest Environmental Impact Study from Ascendant. Although those that oppose the mining consider this a victory, the future of the Intag cloud forests remains uncertain. In the meantime, DECOIN continues to promote economic alternatives to development and strives to raise international awareness of the Intag residents' struggles.

The Human Rights Brief is accepting submissions for the next edition of the "NGO Update." If your organization has an event or situation it would like to publicize, please send a short description to hrbrief@wcl.american.edu and include "NGO Update" in the subject heading of the message. Please limit your submission to two paragraphs. The Human Rights Brief reserves the right to edit for content and space limitations. **HRB**

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