

Hondurans 'march for life'

Protest indiscriminate destruction of forests

Paul Jeffrey/CNS

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras — After years of struggling against environmental destruction in the isolated mountains of central Honduras, a Honduran priest took his protest to the nation's capital.

Thousands of peasant farmers who suffer from massive deforestation sporadically joined Father Andres Tamayo on a 120-mile, seven-day "March for Life" as it wound through the central highlands.

The nonviolent protest, led by Father Tamayo and several other priests and religious working in the remote province of Olancho, marked an escalation of the environmental campaign in Honduras and the church's leadership in it.

The protesters demanded a moratorium on logging in central Honduras until a "forest audit" can be conducted and plans developed for sustainable use of forest resources. They claim indiscriminate logging has dried up water sources and exacerbated poverty in the region.

After the marchers delivered a petition to leaders of the National Congress, Father Tamayo led 10,000 marchers across the city to the Presidential Palace. Honduran President Ricardo Maduro designated a committee of assistants to dialogue with the protesters, who refused to talk to anyone but Maduro.

"We have sent a message that from the little pieces of land where we live, we are going to take back this country," Father Tamayo, pastor of the Catholic parish in Salama, told Catholic News Service.

"I hope that someday the president can feel their suffering and begin to respond. He told the press that the march made no sense. Yet what alternatives do people have left?" Father Tamayo said.

Boston-born Bishop Tomas Mauro Muldoon of Juticalpa told CNS, "It's a political error not to receive these people. At least the president could have met symbolically with them for five minutes and then left them with the commission he appointed."

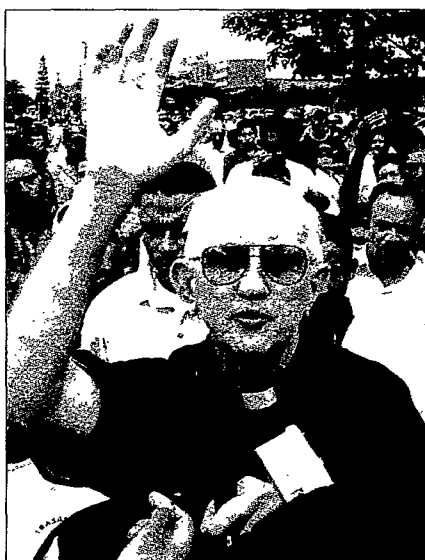
"I'm walking to seek justice," said Father Raymundo Osorto, a parish priest from La Union who walked the entire seven days. "There are villages that have been plunged into poverty and desperation after a few rich business people extracted millions and millions of dollars of timber," he said.

In a rare political development,



Paul Jeffrey/CNS

Thousands of protesters led by a Franciscan priest end a seven-day, 120-mile "March for Life" in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa June 26. The protesters were demanding a halt to indiscriminate logging in the country's forests.



Paul Jeffrey/CNS

Bishop Tomas Mauro Muldoon of Juticalpa, Honduras, speaks to protesters June 26 outside the presidential palace in Tegucigalpa.

the march brought together environmentalists and political activists.

"Walking to defend the forests is walking to defend life and the human rights of people to have fresh water and clean air. The march isn't an end in itself, but a means to take back Honduras from those who commit ecological genocide in order to profit from nature violating the basic right of people to life," said Bertha Oliva, coordinator of the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained in Honduras.

Father Tamayo has slowly escalated his environmental activism over recent years, leading highway

closures to block the passage of logging trucks and last year fasting in public for a month. His protests have earned him the enmity of several powerful owners of logging companies. The priest, a native of El Salvador, has received death threats.

Church leaders in the area recently revealed that timber company owners pooled \$40,000 to pay for the priest's assassination if Father Tamayo did not leave the country by the end of May.

"Those who want me dead won't go to heaven by fabricating a hell here on earth. I'm afraid of dying, but I won't leave Honduras," Father Tamayo said.

The government ordered strict security for Father Tamayo's march. A military bodyguard was never far from Father Tamayo's side, and when the priest entered Tegucigalpa he was closely guarded by a contingent of police officers.

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa walked a few minutes with Father Tamayo as he entered the capital. Bishop Muldoon participated in the march on its first and last days. He has been critical of the priest's tactics in the past, yet activists claim the bishop is coming around to their way of thinking.

Bishop Muldoon has not ignored the theme; six years ago he drafted a pastoral letter on environmental concerns.

"We've made progress," Father Tamayo told CNS June 24. "(The bishop) accepts our struggle now. He may not make it his own cause, but at least he lets us do it."

RECOGNIZING

• DeSales High School physics students Nick Hollon, Robert Jaynes and Kevin Dombroski placed fourth in the physics part of the Exxon-Mobile Science Olympiad recently held at Finger Lakes Community College in Hopewell.

• Catholic Family Center has received a \$10,000 grant from the Joan and Harold Feinbloom Supporting Foundation of the Rochester Area Community Foundation. The grant will be used to benefit homeless women and children in CFC's Women's Place and Sanctuary House shelters.

• Aquinas Institute has named Chris Schultz, class of '92, as its new hockey head coach. He has been an assistant hockey coach at SUNY Geneseo.

• The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations has given St. Ann's Community, Rochester, the Gold Seal of Approval for quality Long Term Care Accreditation.

• Volunteer mentors honored by Livingston County Catholic Charities' Helping One Person Excel (HOPE) youth mentoring program are: Bill and Nancy Lisow, Donna Flaherty, Joan Valione, Annette Delahooke, Brenda Paine Davis, Karin Neumann, Steve Saunders, Cynthia Hursh, Tricia Becker, Jean Manly, Robin Bell, Leia Johnson, Bob Wright, Jessica Bedell, Russell Sutfin, Jason and Jennifer Fitzgerald, Margaret Simons, Diane Acomb, Eriga Harding, David Kingston, Miranda Conway, Nita Hawkins, Serena Kniffen, Eric Mendel, Bob Haslett, Cheryl Woods, Cindy Wetherbee, Ann Fritz, Jen Sommers, Eric Schiener, John Kiehle, Gerald Presler, Monica Kastner, Andy Thompson, Lucille Kane and Casey Randall. Those interested in youth mentoring in Livingston County may contact Kim Ruliffson or Robin Krupp at 585/658-4466.

• DeSales High School sophomore and honor student Peter Karski has been selected to attend the Defense and Intelligence session of the Congressional Student Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C., in July.

• DeSales High School juniors Stephanie Vistocco and Grace Lynch of Geneva and Erin LeClair of Waterloo attended the Rochester Institute of Technology Young Women's Day Conference and Workshop Session.

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