

NICARAGUA'S CANAL

'Great Project of Physical and Human Transformation'

Part 2

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Dr. Telémaco Talavera, president of the Agrarian University of Nicaragua, and spokesman for the Nicaragua Great Inter-Oceanic Canal Commission, gave the following interview to Gerardo Castilleja, of EIR's Mexico City Bureau, on Dec. 20, 2014. It has been translated from Spanish.

EIR: Let's talk about the physical economic aspects of the new Nicaragua Canal. To manage the country that will result from the building of the new canal, the education system will have to be restructured; the Nicaraguan educational program and training programs for skilled labour will offer more than 300 new under- and post-graduate programs, and relations have already been established with universities from different countries. You, yourself, headed a delegation that visited the Mining University of China, which is involved in feasibility studies for the new canal. How do you see this process?



Dr. Talavera: "The BRICS are a growing reality, a group of emerging countries with great potential in the world, which is playing an important role, and cannot be pushed aside. . . ."

Talavera: All the economic, social, and environmental sectors of Nicaragua will have a new reality, starting with the phase of construction, and in the implementation of this great project of physical and human transformation, which is the Great Inter-Oceanic Canal. We have to redefine education at all levels, from the first, primary, to technical and higher education. Science, technology, and innovation also have to be redefined for Nicaragua's new reality.

To improve quality, we are preparing skilled labour, and technical and professional experts for this new reality, not only for construction, maintenance, and related works, but for all the economic aspects and services which a different economic and social reality require. In consultation with universities in this region, such as the International Maritime University of Panama and the Technological University of Panama, those in Spain, and the world, not only in China, we really are addressing the new challenges in education at all levels, but especially higher technical education.

We've spoken about offering 315 new courses of study, but we have to work on bringing up to date the already trained technical experts and professionals for the challenges of the new reality now with the canal. Some technical experts and professionals will need specialization in specific areas which are going to be required in Nicaragua's new economic, scientific, and technological dynamic, and new technical experts and professionals will have to be educated in fields which we do not yet have.

When we speak of 315 new programs, a wide range

of specialties, and new degrees, and post-graduate degrees are involved, to be carried out over the next five years, not only across the university spectrum, but also in Nicaragua's national technological universities. There are fields in which we have to bring in specialists from around the world to be able to educate the educators, and send talented young people and Nicaraguan professionals to different parts of the world to specialize in areas of interest for this new reality. Education and health will have new opportunities and challenges, and human resources will have to be educated. Thus, production, the environment, infrastructure, and services will also face new opportunities and challenges. Tourism and services will have to be redefined. All this requires re-evaluating human resources, bringing them up to date, and

offering new opportunities. New knowledge through research, innovation, and a new policy will be required, which Nicaragua will work on hand-in-hand with institutions from around the world.

Already in 2014, we have had graduates' and other people's skills upgraded, but lawfully this will take off in 2015, and into the future. Although construction of the canal is estimated to take five years, after which it will begin operating, a canal is something not limited in time. For example, the Panama Canal began operations 100 years ago, and now is at its peak; thus, we have to plan for the short-, medium- and long-term, in a world that is changing in scientific, technological, and commercial terms.

A New Economic and Social Dynamic

EIR: How will the canal affect its Central American neighbours? Do you think it will be necessary to import workers?

Talavera: Nicaragua has established national reconstruction as a policy of state, under the leadership of Commander Daniel Ortega, which has also been accepted by Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Company (HKND Group). So, we are going to prioritize, first, the hiring of workers and specialists on a national level; secondly, on a regional level, and thirdly, on an extra-regional level, if there are no Nicaraguans available.

Since Nicaraguans have been forced to emigrate to other countries in the region, or elsewhere, to

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seek opportunities, now there will be opportunities for Nicaraguans, and for workers and specialists from different parts of the world, but especially from this region, as a political priority, to employ them in this new, intense dynamic in Nicaragua.

Moreover, I should point out that the issue is not just jobs, but we will also make national companies a priority, and if these don't have the economic, technical, or financial capabilities, then they will associate with international companies to increase their skill levels by working hand-in-hand with those foreign companies in the operation and construction of the canal. We'll need skilled workers and specialists from the region, but we'll prioritize national and regional companies able to participate directly, or in a consortium, with other international companies. This will thus unleash a new economic and social dynamic for Nicaragua and for the region, in terms of services, workers, and the business sector.

EIR: What are the implications for Nicaraguan agriculture to be able to provide food for workers? Initially, you'll have 50,000 workers. Will you have to import food?

Talavera: There are two issues here. A few days ago, someone asked, what do farmers have to do with the canal? Nothing, they said. But of course, they do have a connection with it, for different reasons. One, if personnel come from different parts of the world, they have to be fed, and the raw material has to be produced in Nicaragua. If there are Nicaraguan workers now in other countries who come here to work, they have to be fed.

Moreover, in Nicaragua there are important segments of the population whose food security and sovereignty are not fully guaranteed. Many of our people live in poverty. If we improve their living conditions, consumption of food and services will increase. So we are going to need more agricultural products. Certainly, in some cases, we'll have to import products, primarily from neighbouring countries, while we develop our productive capabilities.

So, it will be a combination of things: increase our productive capabilities, which will be important for our producers and workers; but, we also have to increase the demand for products that we don't produce, or we don't have in sufficient quantity, and this will create opportunities for producers in the region or in other parts of the world.

Undoubtedly, the demand for a flow of workers, tourists, investors, and improvement in the living conditions of Nicaraguans will increase. So this will spark a dynamism in the agricultural sector to produce more and better. We will undoubtedly have to continue exporting some agricultural products, as well as expand imports, to meet the growing demand in the country.

Geo-economics and Great Projects

EIR: What is your view of Chinese President Xi Jinping's vision of great projects, based on the "win-win" principle? Do you think that Nicaragua's perception of China is different from that of other countries?



Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (left) with chairman of contractor HKND, Wang Jing during the framework agreement in Managua in June 2014.

Talavera: First, let me point out that despite the political or ideological differences that still persist in the world, we live in a reality that is different from the time of the Cold War. Mainland China and the United States not only have financial and trade relationships; I would venture to say that they are practically interdependent in trade and financial terms. We have gone from geopolitics, which dominated the world during the Cold War, to geo-economics, without denying—and I insist on this—the political and economic differences; but it's geo-economics that fundamentally predominates.

Mainland China and Taiwan of course don't have diplomatic relations; they have diplomatic conflicts, but in economic terms, an enormous pragmatism prevails. There are Mainland companies in Taiwan, and vice versa. The Taiwan Strait is one of commercial interchange. So, these great projects can be the driver of aspects of the world economy and of economic growth.

However, in the Nicaraguan case, these great projects are also seen as drivers of the micro-economy, because Nicaragua has a combination of what we call macro-micro: We have the macro-level of infrastructure, energy, and communications; the macro-transformation of production and services, but also the transformation of the economic and social aspects on the level of the family and the community.

On a global scale, these great projects are drivers of aspects of the world economy. For example, the Nicaraguan Great Canal Project will allow companies from North America, Europe, Asia, and Central America to reduce the time for moving export and import products. It will reduce costs because the distance is shortened, but also because they are going to be able to use the large, more efficient ships that are now being built. It will reduce greenhouse gas emissions such as CO₂, and thus will have a positive environmental impact, something that carries great weight in the world today. China, the U.S., and other countries see this, and are interested. Thus, these great projects are a strategic vision of transformation, and contribute to invigorating other great projects that have been launched in the world.

EIR: Approximately 20 years ago, the revolutionary idea



Nicaragua, along with Latin America and the Caribbean, said Dr. Talavera, "is a country, and a continent, of youth," who can be "the drivers of transformation." Shown: Children participate in a workshop in Esteli, which provides artistic and cultural education for youth.

of the World Land-Bridge was established, as a platform for development that will begin with the New Silk Road, which was a hot topic of discussion at the recent APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation] meeting. In fact, a \$40 billion fund for the New Silk Road has been set up. How does the Great Nicaraguan Canal fit into that perspective?

Talavera: As I said, the Nicaraguan Canal will not substitute, replace, or compete with other great transformative projects, such as those you mention. Nor will it even compete with the Panama Canal, once its expansion is complete. Rather, it will serve as a driver of these other great projects, and will even contribute to the expansion of the Panama Canal. The Nicaraguan Canal, as I said, should be viewed from the standpoint of complementarity and synergy with the great infrastructural, economic, and social transformations occurring in the world. It will serve as an incentive, or, as Costa Rican President [Luis Guillermo] Solís said, a driver for these other great regional and world projects.

The BRICS Are a Growing Reality

EIR: Chinese President Xi Jinping has invited the United States to join the New Silk Road development program, and to abandon, as you said, the policy of confrontation, in particular, the targeting of Russia and China. Here at *EIR*, we think this is an excellent initiative. In fact, we have publicized internationally the names of prominent individuals who have signed the call for the United States and Europe to find the courage to reject geopolitics and collaborate with the BRICS. What is your view of this initiative? In the context of what the BRICS have created, do you think that nations as important as the U.S. and Europe must join this call?

Talavera: I would say that, not only can they join, they must join this initiative, because we really can no longer live in a world of confrontation. We truly have to make the logic of respect for sovereignty, for self-determination, for the freedom of peoples to have their own views and their own economic and social vision prevail in the world.

The unipolar or bipolar world that we have today cannot prevail. The BRICS are a growing reality, a group of emerging

countries with great potential in the world, which is playing an important role, and cannot be pushed aside—which should not be pushed aside. These nations should not be ignored or underestimated by the United States and Europe, because otherwise, over time, that would really backfire against them. This is a reality which is moving forward.

So indeed, I believe we must put an end to that imperial view, that arrogant view of being the owners of the world, and that everybody else has to be at their feet or be subordinated to them. Instead, we must promote cooperation, respect in the whole world, beyond specific aspects and natural and necessary differences in culture, politics, religions, etc., so that the whole world can really advance toward a society which has lower levels of poverty, of marginalization, of environmental deterioration, and more peace—peace not only as the absence of armed struggle, but really as the respect that must exist among peoples and countries.

It goes without saying that the world is changing. In fact, the agreement concluded just two days ago between the governments of the United States and Cuba reflects that change. This is a new reality, that after 50 years, they realized they can't continue with the same failed policy. This is not a policy which contributes to the well-being of nations or peace in the world, and thus must change.

In that context, I would say that Europe and the United States not only can, but must continue changing toward becoming promoters of peace, and not consider themselves the rulers of the world, above the very sovereignty, self-determination, or views of other peoples and countries.

A Continent of Youth

EIR: To conclude, I'd like to ask you a somewhat more subjective question. You are the president of an important university, Nicaragua's Agrarian University, and thus you deal directly with young people. Could you talk to us about optimism among Nicaraguan youth? Because Mexican youth, in particular, are very demoralized. I understand that in the United States, one of the reasons driving young people into drug use is a profound pessimism in which they see no hope for the future. What is happening with Nicaraguan youth today?

Talavera: Thank you for that question, because I feel this is a crucial issue.

First, Nicaragua, Latin America, and the Caribbean face a very particular situation. Basically, this is a country, and a continent, of youth. Youth represent a potential to construct and to build, but they also face a high risk of choosing paths that lead them to harm themselves, their families, and society. In Nicaragua's case, I want to underscore a key strategy—as part of our human development plan, as part of the strategies promoted by the national reconciliation government, the universities and society as a whole—to strengthen that vision, that dynamism and initiative which characterize youth, so that they can be the drivers of transformation. And as I tell them, they can not only be the future of Nicaragua, but also the present and the future in Nicaragua.

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When we say that Nicaragua is in its best moment, it's not because we don't have multiple problems and difficulties, but because we've advanced a great deal and we're moving in the right direction. The goal is within our reach, but we'll never attain it if we're not moving in the right direction; and at this time, youth in Nicaragua are a fundamental motor for change.

Many achievements in the areas of health, education, natural disaster prevention, building of peace, etc., would not have been possible in Nicaragua at this time, had we based ourselves on a monetarist logic. In economic terms, Nicaragua continues to be one of the poorest countries in the region, although with an enormous wealth potential. But, we've been able to make progress because, of course, we have a political structure, a human development plan, and because, in large measure, we have youth with that dynamism and energy which feels hope, and sees the possibility of being actors, of being protagonists for social transformation. And that gives meaning to their lives.

Now, contrary to this vision, in other countries or in Nicaragua itself, even were young people to live in better economic conditions, but felt they had no future to build, or weren't moving in the right direction, that is their frustration. It creates the possibility that they'll choose the wrong path—drugs, delinquency, vagrancy, etc.—instead of working to develop art, culture, and other healthy activities, and use that energy, that vision, creativity, and innovation, to be able to say: "We are going to be builders, we are builders of a better society for ourselves, for our families, and for society."

Unfortunately, this is not the view in many countries, as in our beloved brother-country of Mexico, whose friendship we value so much. In Nicaragua, I feel that one of our crucial strategies has been to understand, value, and situate young people as the driver of economic, social, and human development—of current and future change. I should add that, in addition to youth, we greatly value our women, who play a critical role, and for this reason, Nicaragua has gone from 90th place to 10th place in terms of gender equality. For three years in a row, we've been in first place in terms of building gender equality.

Thus, women and young people (of course, without

ruling out all members of society, including men) are the fundamental protagonists in the building of a new society—present and future—so that Nicaragua, along with the rest of the world, moves in the right direction, and that our youth not be an example of self-destruction, or the destruction of the family and society, as we now are unfortunately seeing in many parts of the world.

'Let Us Move Forward!'

EIR: Dr. Talavera, I need not say how much we appreciate your time. You should know that the majority of the readers of our magazine are in the United States, and I think it would be very important for them to look beyond their own borders to see the profound change taking place, and that, as in other periods of U.S. history, the population be able to grasp the historic role of a United States that collaborates with other nations, guided by the principle established by Franklin D. Roosevelt—that nations can establish a system of mutually beneficial cooperation. Are there any final words you'd like to direct to our readers in the United States?

Talavera: From the nation and government of Nicaragua, from the Nicaraguan educational sector, I greet the American people, and I say that you are a people who have a great historical opportunity to also contribute to economic, social, and human transformation, and to do so with respect—respecting the dignity of each nation, of each person. You truly have that great opportunity: not to continue imposing and increasing levels of marginalization and inequality in the world, but to be real promoters of greater degrees of justice, equality, solidarity, and cooperation. From the South, we appreciate the American people; but we also want to be appreciated and respected, and that together as brothers, beyond our political views or religious beliefs, we be able to move forward in a world that is diverse—diversity as potential—but also more dignified and just for each and every one of us, without distinction, where we will come together in peace and dignity, in Nicaragua and in the world. I greet you with great affection and love. Let us continue together with respect. To the noble American people we say, *Adelante!* Let us move forward!



The current "Panamax" (maximum size of a ship that can pass through the Panama Canal) is about 5,000 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units—the international standard used to measure container ship capacity); the expanded Panama Canal will be able to handle ships more than 2.5 times that size, or some 13,000. Even that is dwarfed by the Nicaraguan Canal, which will be able to handle ships up to 25,000 TEU—five times Panamax. Brazil's new iron ore cargo vessels will be too large to go through the expanded Panama Canal, and even the expanded Suez Canal. But they can be handled by the Nicaraguan Canal. This strongly suggests that the current maritime shipping route from Belém, Brazil (which is very close to Carajás's principal port of São Luis) to Shanghai, China—which currently goes eastward across the Atlantic, rounds Africa's Cape of Good Hope, and

then traverses the Indian Ocean towards China—will instead go westward, once the Nicaraguan Canal is in operation, proceeding through the canal and across the Pacific, directly to Shanghai. The current route, according to maritime shipping experts, takes an estimated 36 days to cover 22,800 km; the new route will be a shorter 20,500 km and take only 32 days—a saving of more than 10%, which is highly significant in physical-economic terms, given the magnitudes involved.