



Dear Friends,

After a six-month lapse in our circulars, we start this one sharing the amazing news that the [Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#) has ordered Argentina to cede an undivided deed to 4000 km² of ancestral territory to the *Lhaka Honhat* Association of Aboriginal Communities. This was one of the key goals we came out to work towards over 20 years ago, and to which many different people and organisations have quietly contributed towards over time. Our bishop referred to this landmark event in the following terms: *“Having worked for many years in northern Argentina, first as a linguist and then as a pastor, I am thrilled that this quiet, ongoing struggle for recognition of the rights of the original peoples to live without interference in these ancestral lands, has finally borne fruit.”* There are still years of work ahead to get this ruling implemented, but it is a significant step in the right direction.

A lot more has also been happening in these past months, so as ever, here are some snippets ...

Family



We ended 2019 with Andrew paying a brief visit to his parents in the UK, and a fleeting visit to our home church in St Albans, following a week in Addis Ababa. Maria and Tomas (on a contract) celebrated Christmas in Puerto Rico, while the rest of us stayed home. Andrew then spent a week in North Carolina (US) with work meetings. Our own Carolina spent the summer studying and successfully sitting a series of final exams. Cecilia remained very busy in her legal work and postgraduate studies. As a side note, she is working with the lawyer who led the case for the *Lhaka Honhat* against the Argentine state (Salta is a very small world!).

Not surprisingly we ended last year pretty worn out. Due to work and studies we postponed a long-awaited Caribbean holiday till March, and then COVID-19 came along! With tickets in hand we were in two minds about travelling but did so on doctors' orders - seriously! We arrived at our destination in the Dominican Republic during the same week that coronavirus cases were registered both there and back in Argentina. Though tense, we did get to enjoy a very restful week, and got home just days before Argentina introduced lockdown, including a total stop to air travel.

Deforestation not locked down

Lockdowns have not affected agricultural and farming activities. Indeed, it would seem the restrictions on social movement have meant the activity can proceed with less opposition than ever. Over a six-week period during the lockdown, Greenpeace has reported the loss of 9 300 hectares (approx. 23 000 acres) of forests across northern Argentina.

Salta's new government has positioned key players from the agroindustry in charge of environmental policy, which does not bode well for the coming four years.



Syndemic

COVID-19 is spreading in parts of Argentina where we already have an epidemic of dengue fever. Salta is a case in point, with 2200 cases registered for the current dengue season – 140 in the capital city. This could, potentially, lead to a syndemic, *the aggregation of two or more concurrent or sequential epidemics or disease clusters in a population with biological interactions, which exacerbate the prognosis and burden of disease*. This does not bear thinking about, yet it is a reality across some parts of Latin America, so we would value your prayers for safety as we continue to experience these new uncertainties.



Environmental workshop requests



Building on the environmental awareness workshops we helped run last year in Tartagal (see last circular), we have now been invited to do similar events, but with a group of local churches. With funding from St Paul's church in St Albans, we will be working with our colleague Viviana Andrade to design and run a series of events that will aim at empowering congregations to engage in creation care activities. The format of these activities will depend very much on the limitations imposed by lockdowns and social-distancing measures. It may well be necessary to shift our focus to empowering local churches in how they themselves respond and minister in the context of the pandemic.

La Caldera on stand-by

Though there is still more to be done, the work we have helped lead in the refurbishment of the diocesan retreat center in La Caldera ended at a point which has allowed the property to be used. The Diocese has run several events there now, and it has been very exciting to see how the new developments have allowed the place to be used much more effectively in Christian ministry. The combination of some changes in our Diocesan administrative structure and the lockdown has meant that future work in La Caldera has been put on hold for the time being.



Prayer Pointers

Please pray for the following points:

- Give thanks for the positive news on indigenous land claims on the Pilcomayo – pray for an effective implementation of the measure.
- Give thanks that Argentina's lockdown has limited the expansion of COVID-19 – pray it stay that way.
- Pray for our kids. Carolina will continue her last year at vet school via on-line classes and exams – but her practical classes are being postponed for the foreseeable future. Cecilia has been offered a place to do a master's in law in the US, but the bursary offered will not be enough to cover her costs. Tomas' work is stopped and will be subject to airlines resuming flights.

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