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Letter to The Current, Canadian Broadcast Corporation

[From Grahame Russell, Toronto human rights lawyer, co-director of Rights Action, www.rightsaction.org. Grahame has worked on international development, relief and human rights issues for over 20 years, including living in Mexico and Central America for over 9 years. In 1995, Grahame worked with MINUGUA, United Nations Human Rights Mission in Guatemala.]

I write concerning The Current's November 9 report on Guatemala, now that MINUGUA (United Nations Human Rights Mission) is pulling out. The Current gave due coverage to the legacy of suffering and trauma in Guatemala, as set out in the moving interview with the women from Vancouver who works with survivors of Guatemala's genocide and repression, including torture and rape.

The Current then avoided addressing or even referring to the complicit and negative role that Canada and particularly the USA played in Guatemala's horror story.

This factoring out of how governments and private economic interests in the global north contribute to and benefit from Guatemala's poverty, exploitation, racism and repression serves to entrench the racist status quo that exploits and uses repression to crush forces for change.

Through the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, the USA, with direct or acquiescent support of the west, funded, armed, trained and actively participated in Guatemala's terrorism against its own population. To analyze this properly would undermine western propagated versions of the 'war on terrorism' – that we, the good, are fighting 'others' who use terrorism.

In Guatemala, the western-backed military carried out a horrific campaign of terrorism against its majority, Mayan population, including genocide, massacres, disappearances, assassinations, torture, rape as a tool of repression, etc. Across the country today, communities are still – 22 years later – digging up the mass graves where their massacred loved ones were dumped. No justice has been done against the military and political leaders who planned and oversaw the genocide. Many of them are in high military and political offices today.

The Current's decision not to address the complicit role of the US, and of Canada to a lesser degree, distorts a proper understanding of what happened in Guatemala. It distorts what is happening now in Guatemala.

Your interviewee from the departing MINUGUA spoke directly, critically, but even too hopefully about Guatemala's present and future situation. The situation of poverty, racism and repression in Guatemala is constant, normal, and dire. It is not - as the MINUGUA representative acknowledged - really changing.

Through Canada's "free" trade and aid policies and through our IMF, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank policies, we contribute to and benefit from Guatemala's unjust economic system. The Canadian government is aggressively pressuring the Guatemala government to open their resources for exploitation by our mining companies.

Companies [like INCO] had strong and beneficial relations with the worst Guatemalan military regimes of the 70s, 80s, 90s, and the number of Canadian mining companies flooding Guatemala is increasing considerably. Attached, you will find information about INCO's past and on-going operations in the most recent influx of Canadian mining companies that are in exploiting and benefiting from Guatemala's unjust economic model.

Would the CBC do an investigation into INCO's operations in Guatemala, beginning in 1965, and continuing today? The UN Truth Commission, that found that over 200,000 people were killed in Guatemala and that genocide was planned and carried out in various Mayan-regions of Guatemala, also found that INCO's wholly-owned EXMIBAL was directly involved in human rights violations, in collusion with the military.

Would the CBC do an investigation into the recent spike in Canadian mining companies flooding across poverty and repression ravaged Guatemala (and other countries, like Honduras) and how our mining interests and needs impact negatively on the needs of the poor majorities in places like Guatemala and Honduras?

The future well-being of places like Guatemala (a proposition that is unlikely) is dependent on how the issues that beset Guatemala are portrayed. In the measures that the political and information power-holders of rich and dominant countries [like Canada] continue to analyze the poverty, racism and repression of places like Guatemala in a narrow, nation-state framework, divorced from how we contribute to and benefit from their miseries, we condemn them to the repetition of their cycles of poverty, racism and repression.

Phew. Thus ends global power and politics rant # 2343465346.

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