

January 20, 2005

GUATEMALA: Carlos Chen, Mayan-Achi leader of the "Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam", detained and jailed on trumped up charges.

Needed: Letters and phone calls made to the Guatemala government, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank.

If you want on / off this elist: info@rightsaction.org.

Funds and human rights accompaniment also needed. See below.

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Today (January 20), Carlos Chen was detained in Salama, Baja Verapaz on charges of 'amenazas, lesiones graves, e atentos contra la seguridad interna de la nacion' (making threats, causing bodily harm, and threatening the internal security of the nation).

Rights Action considers these to be trumped up charges. The Guatemala authorities are using the legal and penal systems as political tools of repression.

These charges are very serious, and there are pending capture orders against 7 other leaders of the ""Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam.""

RECENT BACKGROUND

On September 7, 2004, over 1,000 members of Mayan-Achi communities negatively affected and/ or forcibly displaced by the Chixoy hydro-electric dam project participated in a peaceful protest at the site of the Chixoy dam.

The 1975-1985 Chixoy dam project was funded and overseen by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, in partnership with the military regimes controlling Guatemala at the time. Repression, related to the construction of the dam, included the massacres and killings of over 400 children, elderly, women and men, forced displacements from home and community, loss of land and more.

On September 7, 2004, the communities were protesting the lack of compensation and reparations for the human rights violations and losses incurred during the construction of the dam.

On 8 September 2004, the communities peacefully ended the protest, after signing an agreement with representatives of the Instituto Nacional de Electrificación, (INDE), State Electricity Institute, other government authorities and observers from the Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos, PDH. This agreement was, ostensibly, to set up a 'discussion table' to assess all the damages and losses caused by the Chixoy dam.

Then, on September 14, in an underhanded move, INDE representatives formally presented a complaint to the Ministerio Público, Public Prosecutor's Office, in Cobán against the leaders of the "Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam" – the same leaders with whom they had signed the agreement.

Now, Carlos Chen has been detained, and Rights Action fears the authorities will try and detain the other 7 leaders, who signed the agreement: Juan de Dios García, Domingo Sic, Rafael Santiago Fernández, Félix Alonso Raymundo, Antonio Vásquez Xitumul, Víctor Lem Colorado.

ACTION:

Please email and then phone the officials below, demanding that all charges be dropped against all 8 men, and that Carlos Chen be released immediately.

It is crucial to insist to the WB and the IDB that this is their business. These are politically motivated charges, using the legal and penal systems as tools of State repression to block community efforts to demand reparations and compensations for loss and suffering due to the Chixoy dam.

The WB, IDB and Guatemala government have the duty to negotiate compensation and reparations in good faith.

CONTACT ADDRESSES:

-- WORLD BANK

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-- INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

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-- GUATEMALA GOVERNMENT

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-- UNITED NATIONS

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NEEDED also are human rights accompaniers in Guatemala and emergency funds for the community-based, Indigenous organizations in the area affected by the Chixoy dam. To contribute tax-deductible funds, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

* United States: 1830 Connecticut Av, NW, Washington DC, 20009.

* Canada: 509 St. Clair Ave W, box73527, Toronto ON, M6C-1C0.

On-line donations: USA and Canada: www.rightsaction.org.

Wire funds to Rights Action: contact info@rightsaction.org, 416-654-2074.

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