

February 19, 2006

GUATEMALA ñ CHIXOY DAM REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN

Use of legal system as took of repression against Dam-affected communities who are fighting for compensation, reparations and justice.

Below:

- Summary of Campaign
- Amnesty International communiqué
- What to do

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CHIXOY DAM REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN

In 1982, over 400 Mayan-Achi people from the isolated Mayan-Achi village of Rio Negro (municipality Rabinal, department Baja Verapaz, Guatemala) were selectively assassinated or killed in a series of massacres committed by the Guatemala army and paramilitaries, so as to forcibly displace the community to make way for the Chixoy hydro-electric dam project, funded and overseen by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank (WB).

Dozens of other Mayan-Achi villages along the river basin were also forcibly displaced, without due consultation or compensation.

Led by massacre survivors from Rio Negro, a coalition has been working since the late 1990s to get compensation and reparations from the Guatemalan government, WB, IDB, and from the major investor countries in the two "development" banks (USA, Britain, Germany, Japan, France, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela) for the extensive loss of life, community, land, livelihood and property.

At www.rightsaction.org, you will find a major report on this on-going struggle for global accountability and justice.

WHAT TO DO: see below.

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 34/005/2006, 8 February 2006

GUATEMALA: POLITICALLY MOTIVATED CHARGES GET IN THE WAY OF JUSTICE FOR MASSACRE SURVIVORS

In Guatemala, human rights violations appear to be addressed by pressing criminal charges against the victims, said Amnesty International as charges are due to be formally presented against nine activists and community leaders from Río Negro. The charges, presented by the State Electricity Institute (INDE), include "activity against the internal security of the nation" and come after leaders from 18 communities participated in peaceful protests in September 2004.

"The charges against the activists are disproportionate, unfounded and clearly politically motivated. They send a strong message that mobilising against the government's agenda will not be tolerated," said Sebastian Elgueta, Amnesty International's researcher on Guatemala. "If the activists are detained and prosecuted, Amnesty International would consider them political prisoners," said Sebastian Elgueta. Amnesty International is calling for the charges to be dropped.

The protests were related to the loss of lives, homes and land incurred during the construction of the Chixoy dam in the 1980s, as

well as the current lack of free running water and electricity in many communities, which they were promised. Protesters also complained about the impunity surrounding a series of massacres that took place in the area between 1980 and 1982 where thousands of people were killed.

The peaceful character of the protests was confirmed by a police report. The communities agreed to withdraw from the demonstrations after the State Electricity (INDE) Institute agreed to initiate a negotiation process. Days later, the INDE presented criminal charges against the community leaders.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Carlos Chen Osorio, survivor and key witness of the 1982 Río Negro massacres; Juan de Dios García, also survivor and director of the Asociación de Víctimas de Rabinal (ADIVIMA), Rabinal Victims' Association are among nine activists and community leaders who face a series of criminal charges.

Numerous studies point out that the area was particularly targeted by the Guatemalan military in their campaign to combat armed groups due to its strategic economic importance. According to human rights activists, between 1980 and 1982, more than 4,000 people were killed in the context of those military operations in the Rabinal area. 444 of the 791 inhabitants of Río Negro are believed to have been killed.

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WHAT TO DO:

- the #1 line of work in favour of community-controlled development, protection of the environment, justice and human rights,

is to fund and directly support organizations [like COCAHICH that is leading the local struggle for reparations in this Chixoy Dam case] so that they can continue to lead this struggle. Please consider make tax-charitable donations to Rights Action in Canada and the U.S.;

- get involved in education and activism work in your home community. The badí development, poverty and repression, in places like Rio Negro, Guatemala, are related to the policies and actions of the ìG8î governments (including the U.S. and Canada), as well as our ìdevelopmentî institutions (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) that work with, legitimize and strengthen the government of Guatemala, even as repression and impunity are widespread;

- consider establishing long-term ìpartnershipsî between your community / organization with grassroots organizations / communities in these countries;

- consider coming to Rio Negro, Guatemala, on an educational-activist delegation;

Rights Action is a development, enviro- and human rights organization, with its main office in Guatemala. We channel your tax-deductible donations to over 50 community development, environment and human rights organizations in Guatemala, Chiapas, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti. We carry out education & activist work in the USA and Canada about global human rights, environment and development issues.

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS: make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

* United States: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887.

* 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.