

July 10, 2006

GUATEMALA: Spanish court issues arrest warrants for war criminals in Guatemala

Since the early 1990s, Rights Action has proudly funded and worked with many community-based and non-government organizations in Guatemala, seeking justice for the repression and genocide of the 1970s, 80s, 90s.

Guatemala is governed today, as in the 1970s and 80s, by abuse of power and impunity; the institutions of a democratic government and the administration of justice do NOT fundamentally work.

Given the on-going impunity and lack of democracy in Guatemala, we are pleased to report that a Spanish court has issued arrest warrants for Guatemala war criminals.

WHAT TO DO: see below. If you want on-off this elist:
info@rightsaction.org

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Rights Action COMMENTARY:

* This NYT article makes no mention of how the genocidal Guatemalan regime was fully supported, militarily, economically and politically, by the international community, lead by the United States;

* The article makes no mention that throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the international community ñ lead by the U.S. and Canada ñ have maintained strong political and economic relations with former General Efraín Ríos Montt, leader of the former governing FRG party. These economic interests including opening Guatemala to mineral resource exploitation by North American mining companies and the signing of a free trade agreement;

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SPANISH JUDGE ORDERS GUATEMALAN EX-RULERS ARRESTED, New York Times, July 7, 2006

GUATEMALA CITY (Reuters) – A Spanish judge on Friday ordered the arrest of two former Guatemalan military rulers for genocide, torture, illegal arrest and terrorism during the Central American country's civil war. High Court Judge Santiago Pedraz called for former Guatemalan leaders Efraín Ríos Montt and Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores to be arrested along with six others in connection with atrocities committed in the 1980s.

Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt ruled during the bloodiest years of Guatemala's 36-year-long civil war, when the army launched a scorched-earth counter-insurgency campaign against suspected guerrilla sympathizers,

brutally killing thousands and wiping entire villages off the map. In 1999, a U.N.-backed truth commission documented more than 600 massacres -- largely committed by the army and its paramilitary fighters -- during a war that left over 200,000 mostly Mayan Indians dead or missing.

The ruling requires local Guatemalan officials to issue local arrest warrants for the eight men. Rios Montt, however, is still an important political figure in Guatemala and has been able to avoid charges brought against him in the past.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, whose father was one of 37 killed during an assault on the Spanish embassy in 1980, warned it would be tough to make Guatemalan authorities carry out the ruling. "It is going to be a very tortuous road, and it's a test of the Guatemalan justice system," Menchu, who brought charges of genocide against the leaders in Spain in 1999, told Reuters. "We will see if we have advanced."

Judge Pedraz traveled to Guatemala last month to investigate war crimes, including the embassy deaths. But Guatemalan authorities blocked the proceedings by honoring appeals brought by Rios Montt and other ex-leaders and the judge was unable to gather any testimony.

Pedraz left the country on July 1 and issued his arrest order after his return to Madrid. Pedraz's ruling is in response to a wartime abuses case Menchu filed in Spain in 1999.

The arrest orders add to Spain's record of tackling international human rights cases. Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon secured the arrest of former Chilean strongman Augusto Pinochet in London in 1998. But British authorities ruled Pinochet was unfit for trial and let him return to Chile.

Last year, Spain tried to extradite former Guatemalan leader Romeo Lucas Garcia, who preceded Rios Montt, to testify about the embassy attack, but he died in May in Venezuela where he was living in exile.

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WHAT TO DO?

- The #1 line of work in favour of global justice and equality, including community-controlled development, protection of the environment, justice and human rights, is to fund and directly support local organizations so that they can continue to lead their own struggles. Please make tax-charitable donations to Rights Action in Canada and the U.S., to help support community-based organizations in countries where we work (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, Chiapas (Mexico), that are struggling for real democracy and the rule

of law;

- Get involved in education and activism work in your home community concerning the negative impacts of global economic and military power abuse whose policies and actions are controlled by the "G8" governments, including Canada and the U.S.;

- Consider establishing long-term "partnerships" between your community / organization with grassroots organizations / communities in these countries that are affected by the global economic and military policies and actions of the G8 countries;

- Consider coming to these countries on an educational-activist delegation;

Rights Action is a development, environment 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 and Haiti. We carry out education & activist work in the USA and Canada (and take educational delegations to these countries) to learn about and get involved in good work for global human rights, a healthy environment and a just economic development model.

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.

For more info and to get on our email and snail-mail lists: info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org

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