

Rights Action – May 13, 2012

## **GUATEMALA “CHIXOY DAM” FORCED EVICTIONS AND MASSACRES ([AlJazeera Youtube short film and article](#))**

### **BELOW**

[AlJazeera Youtube](#) film (2:38 minutes, in English) and news article about the Chixoy Dam forced evictions and related massacres in Guatemala. The Chixoy Dam was a business investment and project of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and World Bank (WB), in partnership with successive military regimes, 1975-1985.

### **SUPPORT THE “CHIXOY DAM REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN”**

See below, for information about how to support the Chixoy Dam reparations campaign.

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- Get on-off Rights Action's listserv: [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)
- Follow Rights Action on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org](http://www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org)

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION IN U.S.A. & CANADA**

Grahame Russell, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

Annie Bird, [annie@rightsaction.org](mailto:annie@rightsaction.org)

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## **GUATEMALA'S LAND GRAB AND MASSACRE**

**[To make way for the Chixoy Dam, a business investment and project of the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank in partnership with successive military regimes, 1975-1985.]**

May 12, 2012, by David Mercer, AlJazeera English ([mercerc\\_dj@yahoo.ca](mailto:mercerc_dj@yahoo.ca))

View the short film (2:38 minutes, English):

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93lfa-J1nQo&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93lfa-J1nQo&feature=player_embedded)

More than 30 years ago Guatemala's military government began construction of the Chixoy Dam on land belonging to indigenous communities. The dam, financed by the World and Inter-American Development Banks, was announced in 1976. When local residents resisted proposed resettlement, the government, accusing the locals of being guerillas and subversives, used force to push them into 'model communities'.

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## **GUATEMALA'S LAND GRAB AND MASSACRE**

<http://blogs.aljazeera.com/americas/2012/05/11/guatemalas-land-grab-and-massacre>

By David Mercer, 2012-05-11

Activists say more than 400 villagers from Rio Negro had been killed by the time the dam wall was complete. I meet activist, land evictee and massacre survivor Carlos Chen in front of the Catholic Church in the town of Rabinal. A solid man in his late-50s, Carlos shakes my hand gently and suggests we go to his village to discuss filming plans for the following day.

While walking along a dusty side street we pass a small museum dedicated to the local Maya Achi culture. Poking my head inside one of the rooms a shiver runs down my spine. Staring at me are the portraits of hundreds of people murdered during Guatemala's civil war. Two entire walls are stacked with images of those massacred in Rio Negro, a community that refused to leave their land to make way for the Chixoy hydroelectric dam. The photographs are taken from government-issued ID cards, and the paper is cracked and yellowing.

Many of the faces are young and innocent-looking. It's impossible to believe they were the dreaded guerillas that Guatemala's war-time government claimed them to be.

Carlos points to a row of photos and lists the family members shown: wife, brother, aunt, uncle. There are no photos of his children; they were too young to be issued government IDs.

#### PACUX

The army-built village where Carlos was forced to move to is indeed poor. Pacux's clapboard houses are crammed together. Children walk barefoot in the dirt streets. And there is a palpable air of desperation.

Calling this place a "model community", as the government has, is a cruel joke.

Carlos tells me about the way the Guatemalan army would turn indigenous communities against each other. Soldiers would enter a village and force men into so-called Civilian Defence Patrols. If the men refused they might well face death. The Patrols carried out much of the army's dirty work in neighbouring villages, including torture and murder.

For many years Carlos says he would see some of the men who killed his family on the streets of Rabinal.

#### THE DAM

Getting to the site of Rio Negro involves a fair amount of co-ordination. We need a 4WD, a boat, and permission to cross over the dam. And we need three hours for the journey. The mountains ringing the reservoir are majestic. No buildings, livestock or people can be seen.

We reach the site of Rio Negro in less than an hour. Carlos and the boat driver discuss in their native Achi where Carlos' house used to be. They move the boat into position. "It's 100 metres down, everything that used to belong to the Chens," he tells me as I film him with my camera.

We scramble up a rocky slope that marks the high point of the reservoir during the rainy season. Just above this we pass the simple wooden house of our boat driver Sebastian. Sebastian's and 15 other families have chosen to leave the army-built "model communities" and have returned to the land of their ancestors.

Despite a three-hour hike to the nearest road, he says he prefers to live here. Here firewood is abundant. They can fish, tend to their livestock, and grow corn. Their families can live well.

Strangely, despite having lost nearly everything to make way for Guatemala's largest hydroelectric dam, there is no electricity here. The irony is not lost on Carlos.

Carlos tells me that despite what they've suffered, his people are not against hydroelectric dams. They simply want to be paid the \$150m in reparations as agreed to by the Guatemalan government.

And more importantly, they want to ensure that something like this never happens again.

View the short film (2:38 minutes, English):

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93lfq-J1nQo&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93lfq-J1nQo&feature=player_embedded)

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## WHAT TO DO:

### TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

for Mayan communities demanding reparations & compensation for the harms & destruction caused by the Chixoy dam, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: <http://rightsaction.org/contributions.htm>

DONATIONS OF STOCK: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

## BACKGROUND

Read: <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/stop-delaying-reparations-plan-victims-%E2%80%9Cchixoy-dam%E2%80%9D-forced-evictions-and-massacres>

## WRITE LETTERS

To the [Government of Guatemala](#), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, with copies to your own elected senators, members of congress and parliament, demanding their full support for a complete reparations program for the victims of their Chixoy dam project.

Otto Perez Molina  
Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
Secretaría de Comunicación Social de la Presidencia  
Palacio Nacional De La Cultura  
6 Avenida y 6 Calle, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala  
[webadmin@scspr.gob.gt](mailto:webadmin@scspr.gob.gt), [cartapresidente@scspr.gob.gt](mailto:cartapresidente@scspr.gob.gt)

President Luis Alberto Moreno  
Inter-American Development Bank  
1300 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20577, USA  
[lmoreno@iadb.org](mailto:lmoreno@iadb.org), (202) 623-1000

President Jim Yong Kim  
The World Bank  
1818 H Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20433 USA  
(202) 473-1000

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