

Rights Action
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A CHIXOY DAM “VILLAGE RELOCATION” DUG UP 30 YEARS LATER

By Grahame Russell, July 2012

Since early 2012, the remains of hundreds of Guatemalans have been exhumed (dug up) from mass graves scattered inside the Guatemalan Army's military base in Coban.



(A delegation from UNBC (University of Northern British Columbia) and Rights Action gathers around one of the dozens of mass graves scattered throughout the Coban military base. Members of the FAFG explain the exhumation process. All photos @ Grahame Russell, May 29, 2012)

This work is being carried out by the amazing FAFG (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation - <http://www.fafg.org/>). The remains dug up in the Coban military base are just some of the hundreds of thousands killed and disappeared during the 1970s, 80s and early 90s by successive Guatemalan regimes.



(In the same pit as the photo above, one sees the remains of one victim – the eyes still blind-folded from when this person was executed, sometime in the early 1980s, and then dumped in this mass grave.)

CHIXOY DAM / RIO NEGRO MASSACRES

It is almost certain that approximately 45 of the skeletal remains dug up are Mayan Achi villagers who were forcibly taken away in Army helicopters, on May 14, 1982, from a place called Los Encuentros, along the Chixoy River, ... never to be seen or heard from again, until now.



(This pit, in the foreground, is where the remains of the 45 victims from Los Encuentros were dug up in the Coban military base by the FAFG.)

Now, the dead will speak. The dead will re-confirm that the Los Encuentros massacre was the third of four Rio Negro / Chixoy Dam massacres and that these massacres were, in effect, the "relocation" of the Rio Negro community carried out by the Guatemalan military regime, so as to clear the Chixoy River dam basin of people, for the completion of the Chixoy Dam.

GENOCIDAL "DEVELOPMENT" PROJECT

From 1975-1985, the World Bank (WB) and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) – in partnership with successive military regimes - invested almost \$1 billion in the Chixoy hydro-electric dam project.

In 1999, the United Nations "Truth Commission" concluded that successive Guatemalan regimes killed or disappeared at least 250,000 people (a majority being Mayan), and that in certain regions of the country, the repression amounted to genocide being carried out against local Mayan populations. The Rabinal region (department of Baja Verapaz), where the Chixoy Dam was constructed, is the millennial home to the Mayan Achi people and is one of the regions where genocide was carried out.

For the Mayan peoples of the Chixoy River basin, this "development" project was a criminal disaster in every way imaginable. Some 33 villages – 26 up river from the dam wall (at Pueblo Viejo) and 7 more down river - were harmed and destroyed in varying degrees. Close to 11,000 Mayan villagers were directly harmed.

No community suffered more than Rio Negro. The repression suffered by this Mayan Achi village was due to the fact that they were peacefully refusing to be illegally relocated from their homes and land, without consultation and consent, without proper

compensation and then relocation to land of equal or better size and value in terms of fertile land, access to year-round water sources, etc.

Repression against Rio Negro began in earnest in 1980 when two community leaders were 'disappeared' while walking along remote paths to a meeting with the Chixoy Dam project managers. While the bodies of these two leaders reappeared a few days later, not so the community "libro de actas", the community's most important book of written agreements and information, including all the (false) promises made by the project managers.

In 1981, seven villagers were killed in Rio Negro by police agents working on behalf of the project. The police had hiked into the remote Rio Negro to detain villagers who, they allege, stole provisions from the dam construction site. When villagers opposed these detentions on trumped up charges, the police ended up killing seven villagers.

Still, the people of Rio Negro refused to be relocated. Then the real repression began. In 1982, Rio Negro villagers were targeted with four large-scale massacres:

- On February 12, some 75 adults (mainly men) were killed in the neighboring village of Xococ (Sho-Cok)
- On March 13, 177 women and children were killed in the mountains above Rio Negro
- On May 14, some 85 were killed or disappeared at the Los Encuentros hamlet
- On September 14, some 90 were killed in the neighboring village of Agua Fria

As with all of Guatemala's repression and genocide against its own people, these massacres were justified in terms of combating leftist guerillas in the context of the "cold war". The U.S. was deeply involved in Guatemala's repression and genocide, funding, training, arming and even participating directly with Guatemalan "security" forces from the 1954 U.S.-orchestrated coup forward.

These massacres were in fact the "relocation" of Rio Negro. In total, over 440 villagers were killed. Along the Chixoy River, other communities - that had been watching and following the lead of Rio Negro, in terms of demanding that they be properly consulted, and then from there possibly compensated and relocated – quickly "relocated", knowing what had happened to their Rio Negro neighbors.

LOS ENCIENTROS

After the first two Rio Negro / Chixoy Dam massacres (in Xococ and Rio Negro), survivors fled to the mountains to scratch out their survival; some died of malnutrition and disease in the mountains.

Many survivors were living precariously at a place, along the Chixoy River, known as Los Encuentros. It is the spot where the departments of Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz and Quiche converge.

Early on May 14, 1982, soldiers and civil defense patrollers hiked into and surrounded the river side hamlet. 40 villagers (survivors of the first two massacres) were killed; many young women and older girls were raped before being killed. Another 45 were forcibly taken away in Army helicopters, never to be seen again ... until 2012.

In the context of the genocides that Guatemalan regimes carried out in at least 4 Mayan regions in Guatemala, a mini-genocide was planned and carried out against the village of Rio Negro, so as to help further the Chixoy Dam project.

TRUTH, MEMORY and NO JUSTICE

Most of the survivors of the Rio Negro / Chixoy Dam massacres live today in cramped, impoverished conditions in the neighborhood of Pacux, on the edge of the town of Rabinal.

The exhuming (digging up) of the remains of the 45 victims is one more step in their long, torturous path of telling the truth about what happened to them and recovering their historic memory. To date, however, no justice has been done for the crimes they suffered due to the WB and IDB "development" project.

Both banks profited from their investments in the Chixoy Dam project.

Both banks claim, today, that they complied with the terms of the project (including the proper relocating of the affected populations!).

Both banks claim, today, they had no knowledge of any alleged wrong-doings related to the Chixoy Dam project.

Both banks are lying. Along with the Guatemalan government, the banks are responsible for what happened, and should pay full and proper reparations.

REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN

In 1993, Rio Negro survivors began their long and courageous struggle for truth, memory and justice, led by ADIVIMA (Association for the Integral Development of the Mayan Achi Victims). In 2005, COCAHICH (the Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam) was formed to unite the 33 dam harmed communities and struggle for reparations.

Today, efforts continue to expose the truth about the suffering and destruction caused by the Chixoy Dam, including the Rio Negro massacres, and to pressure the WB and IDB to fund a \$150 million "Reparations Plan" that was agreed to in 2010, by the government of Guatemala, but has not been funded or implemented.

Reparations and justice delayed, 30 years and counting. A lot more pressure is needed to end the impunity of the government of Guatemala, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, and for the surviving victims of the Chixoy Dam project to finally receive some reparations and compensation, to finally receive a measure of justice.

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MORE INFORMATION – in Guatemala:

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PHOTO-ESSAY by James Rodriguez: Exhumation inside the Coban Military Base

<http://www.mimundo.org/2012/06/13/2012-05-exhumation-inside-cobans-former-military-garrison/>

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

WRITE LETTERS

To the President of Guatemala, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, with copies to your own elected senators, members of congress and parliament, demanding their full support for the Reparations Plan for the victims of their Chixoy dam project. (Feel free to include copies of this article.)

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