

The World Bank And Inter-American Development Bank's Chixoy Dam Project: Still Killing Mayan Guatemalans 32 Years Later

By Grahame Russell, September 3, 2014

<http://upsidedownworld.org/main/guatemala-archives-33/5029-the-world-bank-and-inter-american-development-banks-chixoy-dam-project-still-killing-mayan-guatemalaans-32-years-later>



Carlos Chen, a Mayan Achi man I have known since 1994, wrote me on August 27:

“Two women from Pacux were brutally killed on Monday, August 25, 2014. One was 40-year-old Francisca Chen Uscap, a tortilla maker who leaves behind 3 children. Francisca was eight years old when her father - Pablo Chen Sanchez - was killed by Guatemalan soldiers and civil defense patrollers in the [first Chixoy Dam/ Rio Negro massacre in Xococ](#). The other was 19-year-old Brenda Marisol Sic Morente, who worked as a maid in the city. Both her grand-mothers were killed in the second Chixoy Dam/ Rio Negro massacre at the place known as Pacoxom, above the village of Rio Negro, on March 13, 1982.

“They were killed in San Jose Pinula, just outside Guatemala City. Their bodies – with signs of torture, cuts all over their heads, teeth pulled out, stomachs cut open, one found naked – were found dumped in Zone 14, Guatemala City. It is believe that they were killed by gangs, and no one knows why.”

On August 29, Carlos wrote with an update:

“The bodies of the two women were buried in the Rabinal cemetery #2, right by the monument commemorating the Panacal massacre. A night long wake was

held in the home of Alejandra Uscap Chen. A second one was held in the home of Mariano Sic. Then, both their bodies were buried.

"These are some of the on-going problems we experience in Pacux."

An All-Around Criminal Project

Francisca was an eye-witness to and survivor of the Chixoy Dam/ Rio Negro massacres, while Brenda was a child of survivors. The Guatemalan military massacred over 440 villagers from the Mayan Achi village of Rio Negro in 1982. Thirty-two years later, two more Mayan Achi women from Rio Negro were brutally killed, caused indirectly, but in effect by the violently imposed Chixoy hydro-electric dam project.

For 20 years, Rights Action has published information related to the massacres, illegal forced evictions and widespread impoverishment caused by the Chioxy dam, a major investment project of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in partnership with the U.S.-backed military regimes of Generals Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efraim Rios Montt, from 1975-1983. Along the Chixoy River, 32 Mayan villages were forcibly displaced in whole or in part by this hydro-electric project. The village of Rio Negro was not only burnt to the ground, and then disappeared under the dam flood basin, but also suffered the most repression amongst the dam affected communities.

Rights Action has long reported on the courageous and, thus far, fruitless efforts by the Chixoy dam harmed communities - united in COCAHICH (Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam) - to secure reparations from the government of Guatemala, IDB and World Bank. In 2010, the government, as witnessed by the World Bank and IDB, agreed to pay a \$154 million for a reparations plan to compensate for the Chixoy Dam harms and violations. To date, this legally binding agreement has been ignored by the Guatemala government, World Bank and IDB. Thirty-two years later, both Banks continue to publicly insist that: first, the Chixoy Dam project was successfully completed; and second, they have no pending responsibilities to the dam affected communities.

Carlos Chen is a victim of the Chixoy Dam/ Rio Negro massacres. On March 13, 1982, the date of the second of four large-scale massacres committed in 1982 by soldiers, police and private security guards hired by the project, Carlos' first wife (pregnant at the time) and two infant children were among the 177 Mayan Achi women and children killed that day.

Similar to the deaths of Francisca and Brenda, the 177 women and children were savagely killed. Young women and girls were raped before being killed. Babies and infants were grabbed by the feet and smashed to death against boulders. Women and children were beaten to death with sticks and rocks. Many were strangled to death. All were dumped in a ravine crevice, at a place known as Pacoxom high above the destroyed village of Rio Negro, and left for the vultures and animals. In the days that followed, Carlos and other surviving family members crept out of the mountains where they were hiding to cover-up the remains of the loved ones as best they could. They built a small cross at the spot that still stands there today.

Since 1993, Carlos and other Chixoy Dam/ Rio Negro massacre survivors have been at the forefront of courageous, tireless work to tell the truth about what happened, and to seek justice and reparations from the Guatemalan government and the World Bank and IDB, for the death, loss of property and livelihood and suffering caused by this "development" project.

Pacux Refugee Community

Life today in the refugee community of Pacux, the home to Francisca and Brenda, is a toxic mixture of the legacy of the massacres and forced displacement, as well as 32 years of poverty, despair, violence and impunity. Of the 32 harmed communities, Rio Negro suffered the most. Survivors of the Rio Negro massacres, that killed over 440 villagers, trickled into Pacux on the edge of the town of Rabinal. Under direct military control until the early 2000s, Pacux was a "resettlement" neighborhood built for displaced Rio Negro villagers with WB and IDB funds.

Since 1982, the survivors - including Francisca and Brenda - have lived here in chronic conditions of poverty, no land, no jobs, no water, no justice, reparations or compensation, no hope. In this context, people flee, if they can find any work elsewhere (like Francisca and Brenda). Many youth turn to gangs and violence. While this is happening in many parts of Guatemala, the legacy of the massacres and repression, plus the utter lack of life prospects, make conditions in Pacux that much harsher.

Why Are the World Bank and IDB Responsible?

As successive U.S.-backed military regimes were carrying out campaigns of massacres and genocide against their own population, the World Bank and IDB took the calculated and financially profitable decision to invest hundreds of millions of dollars directly into the treasury of these regimes, in the name of "development", and partnered directly with them to illegally and violently impose this project.

In partnership with the dictatorships of Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt, the World Bank and IDB never properly consulted with the 32 remote Mayan communities that were going to be impacted by the dam. They also made multiple false promises to the communities about how they would be properly relocated and otherwise compensated for all loss of property, land, livelihood, etc.

Soldiers and police drove in Chixoy Dam project vehicles to carry out repression. Private security guards contracted by the project participated sometimes with soldiers and police in carrying out repression. The project provided food and lodging to soldiers and police who were in the region to use repression against the 32 communities so as to "relocate" them for the project.

When the communities, whose ancestral roots go back as many as 1,000 years in the Chixoy river basin, refused to be relocated, the World Bank and IDB turned a blind eye to repression that began in the late 1970s, climaxing with the four massacres in 1982.

To add insult to injury, both the World Bank and IDB made a profit, years later, on their investments when the project loans including interest were duly paid back to them. Close those case files, thank-you very much.

There has been no investigation into the savage killings of Francisca and Brenda. There likely will be none. As life in Pacux remains a desperate mixture of poverty and joblessness, landlessness and no water, despair, violence and impunity, we need to keep on asking how long will the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and the Guatemalan government continue to not pay reparations to the on-going victims of their profitable investment project – reparations that might, just might, give them a way of starting their damaged lives over?

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For information on Chixoy Dam Reparations Campaign:

- COCAHICH (Coordinator of Chixoy Dam Harmed Communities), Carlos Chen, chenosorio.carlos@gmail.com
- In U.S. and Canada: Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org, www.facebook.com/rightsaction.org

Background info:

“Chixoy Dam: No Reparations, No Justice, No Peace”

16 minute film by Lazar Konforti

English: <http://vimeo.com/50015125>

French: <http://vimeo.com/61324888>

Spanish: <http://vimeo.com/52293087>

To find out more, or to contribute to the Reparations Campaign, visit:

www.rightsaction.org; write to: info@rightsaction.org

To find out more, write the filmmaker Lazar Konforti: lazar.konforti@gmail.com,

www.losdespojados.webs.com

“Poverty In Pacux: 30 Years and Counting”

4 minute film by Rachel Schmidt

<http://vimeo.com/52439128>

The Rio Negro Project: <http://rionegroproject.blogspot.com/>

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada)

Since 1995, Rights Action has supported a wide range of community development and environmental protection projects, and rule of law projects carried out by Chixoy Dam / Rio Negro massacre survivors in Pacux and in the new Rio Negro. To support their efforts, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

Rights Action, (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, Canada, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations: <http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

(Rights Action (USA) is going through a transition and is not accepting donations at this time. U.S. citizens can make donations to Rights Action (Canada), but these donations will not be tax deductible in the U.S.)

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