

33 Three Years Later, A First Measure of Reparations Paid to Victims of the Chixoy Dam Massacres and Evictions

By Grahame Russell

On October 15, 2015, a group of surviving family members of the Chixoy Dam massacres and evictions received their first reparations payments. Finally, a small portion of the Reparation Plan funds owed have been paid, ... 33 years after the atrocities carried out by Guatemalan soldiers, civil defense patrollers and private security working for the Chixoy hydro-electric dam investment project of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).



Teodora Chen was the first to receive a payment of Q85,883 (US\$11,203), for herself and surviving family members. A survivor of and eye-witness to the second Rio Negro massacre (March 13, 1982), when 107 children and 70 women were savagely killed by machetes, rocks and strangulation, Teodora said “I am not happy, but for all that I have suffered, this money will help a bit with my health problems.” (“No me siento contenta, pero sí me cura un poco la herida que tengo, porque el dinero que recibo me va a servir para curar mis enfermedades”.)

- View Telesur report, in Spanish, of this first payment:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioRYIMaKi68&feature=youtu.be>

Teodora is right. Even if the entire amount of reparation funds owed (\$154,000,000 = 1.2 billion quetzales) is paid out one day to the thousands of Chixoy Dam victims, it cannot compensate for all who were killed, for the homes and communities destroyed forever, for the generations of lost livelihood. Before the Chixoy Dam massacres and evictions, the roots of Rio

Negro and 31 other Mayan communities had dated back over 1000 years in the Chixoy river basin.



(Sebastian Iboy, a massacre survivor, walks above the now silt-filled Chixoy river basin. The original community of Rio Negro lies 50-80 meters below this mud. Photo: Grahame Russell, May 30, 2015)

In 1981 and 1982, over 440 Rio Negro villagers – children and elderly, women and men – were massacred, and 32 villages violently evicted, in whole or part, to make way for this investment project.

- View: “Chixoy Dam: No Reparations, No Justice, No Peace”, a 16 minute film summarizing how, at the height of the Guatemalan genocide and repression, the World Bank and IDB invested close to \$1 billion in the Chixoy Dam. (<http://vimeo.com/50015125>)
- Read: “Profiting From Genocide: The World Bank's Bloody History in Guatemala”, by Cyril Mychalejko (<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/14823-profiting-from-genocide-the-world-banks-bloody-history-in-guatemala>), & “Guatemala: The World Bank, a Hydroelectric Dam, and Massacres”, by Grahame Russell (<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/opinion/Guatemala-The-World-Bank-a-Hydroelectric-Dam-and-Massacres-20150416-0018.html>).

Ever since the massacres and evictions, survivors have existed in conditions of poverty and exploitation, violence, corruption and impunity.

- View: “Poverty In Pacux: 33 Years And Counting”, a 5 minute film of survivors of the Chixoy Dam massacres living in poverty, discrimination and trauma in Pacux, a former military concentration camp, now cramped refugee community.
(<http://vimeo.com/52439128>)

Years after the massacres and evictions, carried out by the U.S.-backed genocidal regimes headed by generals Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt, the Guatemalan government paid back the loans-plus-interest to the World Bank and IDB. Yes, both banks profited from their investments. No, neither bank has to pay one penny, not one quetzal of the \$154,000,000 Reparation Plan funds owed the victims.

The World Bank and IDB are investment banks of the nations that most invest in them, starting with the United States and then predominantly other “G8” nations. These same nations have provided the banks with immunity from legal accountability for their actions, both in Washington DC, where they are headquartered, and in countries around the world where they invest.

Extraordinary and Daunting

The courage and persistence of the victims of the Chixoy Dam crimes are extraordinary. 33 years after the atrocities, 21 years after they began struggling for truth, memory and justice, they have received a first, small portion of the reparations owed. It will likely take years more struggle to pressure the Guatemalan regime to pay the remainder of the Reparations Plan.

This struggle is daunting. Guatemala remains deeply characterized by racism, exploitation, poverty, corruption and repression. Many of today’s ruling political, military and economic elites are the same people who were in power during the years of genocide and massacres. The World Bank and IDB, today, are profitably partnering with these elites, investing in “development” projects that violate the rights and territories of Mayan communities. Adding insult to injury, the IDB is aiming to fund to construction of another large-scale hydro-electric dam, on the same Chixoy river.

While it is unlikely in the near future, sooner or later the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (and the major investor countries) must be held fully accountable for the Chixoy Dam massacres and evictions, and for all human rights violations, repression and environmental harms that World Bank and IDB investments contribute to and benefit from.

All respect and thanks to the courageous surviving victims of the Chixoy Dam massacres and evictions. The struggle continues.

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