

Tourism, Repression and Ethnocide in Honduras and Guatemala: From back-packers to 5-star hotels and cruise ships

(<http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=1bd9c3a32a>)

~Connecting The Dots: This is how global inequality and injustice work~



Honduras' Caribbean coast, populated for over 220 years by indigenous Garifuna people, now being violently and corruptly forced from their lands by tourism, African palm, "model city" and narco-trafficking economic interests.

Below:

- "Honduras: Government-supported tourism pushes Garifuna maroons off their land of 200 years", by Diana Bohn
- "Top Guatemalan beauty spot mired in indigenous rights conflict", by David Hill

From mining and dams, to African palm and bananas, from garment "sweat-shop" factories, to tourism, most grassroots organizations Rights Action supports and works with are involved in community and environmental defense struggles against harms, human rights violations and repression caused by mainly international companies and investors supported by governments, the World Bank and IMF.

- What to do/ How to support: See below

Honduras: Government-supported tourism pushes Garifuna maroons off their land of 200 years

December 30, 2016, by Diana Bohn

<http://sfbayview.com/2016/12/honduras-government-supported-tourism-pushes-garifuna-maroons-off-their-land-of-200-years/>



In the Honduran Garifuna community of Barra Vieja, an eloquent spokesperson educates the “Root Causes of Migration” group as one member of the delegation records and another takes notes. – Photo: Root Causes Delegation

In the early 1800s, the government of Honduras awarded 2,500 acres of ancestral land to the Garifuna, descendants of shipwrecked and/or escaped African slaves. The land titles given to the Garifuna communities on the coast of Honduras state that the collective lands cannot be transferred to an outsider, but many Garifuna territories suffer from multiple ownership claims. The Garifuna are struggling to maintain their land.

Randy Jorgensen, the “[Canadian porn king](#)” because he made a fortune with his chain of adult video stores in Canada, moved to [Trujillo, Honduras](#), heart of Garifuna land, in 2007 to develop tourism in Trujillo. He began buying land for real estate development in gated communities that include beach club amenities and with the intention of building a cruise ship port, oceanfront commercial center and park with a zoo.

The Organizacion Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH) filed a lawsuit on behalf of Garifuna communities in 2011. The case is continuing and [was taken up again in May 2016](#).

Jorgensen has partnered with people who were close to the post-military coup administration of Porfirio Lobo and has enjoyed the unconditional support of the authorities of Trujillo Bay to commit a series of abuses in regard to the ownership of the communal lands. “Violence and physical force have been constantly used to threaten the livelihood of the Honduran Garifuna communities,” concluded a [2016 report](#) by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.

Current President Juan Orlando Hernandez took office with the slogan: “Honduras is open for business.”



Seeing is believing why a resort developer would want to steal this Garden of Eden from its rightful owners, the Garifuna, formerly enslaved Africans who have lived there for 200 years.

Well east of Triunfo, near Tela, the Barra Vieja community is [struggling to stay](#) on the remainder of their land. Community members told our “Root Causes of Migration” delegation that this would be the third displacement for them as a people.

First, they were displaced from Africa as slaves. Next, they were expelled from St. Vincent, where they had tried to settle after escaping from slavery. Now, they face expulsion from the Honduran coast.

The Barra Vieja community has rights to their land under three provisions:

- Honduran law provides that after the community lives on the land for 10 years, they have the right to stay. The Garifuna have been on the land for 200 years but are called land invaders.
- The area is designated as a National Park, and the provision of a National Park designation is the people traditionally using the land have the right to remain on the land.
- The U.N. Declaration of Indigenous Rights protects them.



Barra Vieja community leaders tell the Root Causes of Migration delegation how tourism development is forcing many of their people off their ancestral lands to venture onto the long, dangerous trek north to the U.S. The delegation visited Honduras Dec. 9-19, 2016. – Photo: Root Causes Delegation

Nevertheless, the government took a large portion of Barra Vieja land and awarded it to developers for the construction of the 60-room Indura Beach and Golf Resort, part of the “[Curio Collection](#)” by Hilton. Now they want all the rest of the community land, including access to the beautiful, pristine lagoon.

To force the Garifuna off their land, the Honduran government is not providing any basic services that are usually provided to communities. In Barra Vieja, their school was closed and torn down. The community can’t get a teacher for the school they themselves built.



This home on the beach in Barra Vieja reflects the traditions of the people indigenous to the Honduran north coast combined with those of the Africans known as the Garifuna who were brought there in chains, then given the land in the early 1800s. Now the government prohibits the people from cutting forest materials to build their homes. – Photo: Root Causes Delegation

Their road is not being maintained. There is no access to health care, no water, no electricity and no sources of employment. For example, a community member attended all the trainings for promised jobs at the Indura Hotel, which is on land taken from their community, but no employment was given. Jobs are, instead, given to Guatemalan and Salvadoran workers.

The government is putting restrictions on fishing so the community cannot fish in their traditional fishing areas, and fishing is their survival. The government is forbidding Barra Vieja residents from cutting forest materials to build their homes.

The government is forbidding them from using the bay and the lagoon for their own tourism. The Honduran government used government resources to build an airport for helicopters and small planes, but only the resort is using this resource.

The inhabitants of the area protect the environment. They do not over-fish. Sustainable “eco” tourism, the kind of tourism that the community wants to establish, could easily be supported in the area, but the government is freezing the people out in favor of environmentally destructive international tourism.

First, the whole community of 80 people, then the board of directors was legally charged as land invaders. The community won those battles in court, but the Honduran government doesn't honor those decisions.

Two years ago, there were 130 families in Barra Vieja. Now there are only 75. Others have been forced out. The community of California was totally wiped out by the resort. Some of these displaced people will have no choice but to go north.

The 'Alliance for Prosperity' will help the rich get richer and the poor and Indigenous peoples get poorer and, in several important instances, lose their ancestral land



Watter Suaso, 32, a Garifuna migrant who risked his life on La Bestia, returned home to the Garifuna community of Tornabé, now works with the youth who have not headed north at a community center. "La Bestia" ("The Beast") is the dangerous freight train that carries migrants, who jump onto the roof, "on a grueling 1,500-mile journey from the Mexico-Guatemala border to the US. The trip is marked by extortion, violence and sexual assault. Human traffickers who control the route charge an impuesto de guerra (a war tax) to ride the train. Migrants who fail to pay are shot or thrown from La Bestia's roof," writes Tim Smyth in *HonduPrensa*.

The U.S. "[Alliance for Prosperity Plan](#)" is the response to the humanitarian migratory crisis that ushered in an influx of more than 40,000 unaccompanied children from the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) to the southern border of the U.S. The plan allocates military aid and funds for development to the government of Honduras.

Unfortunately, militarization of the police does not provide greater security on the streets, nor does providing "development" funds to international tourist businesses.

The Indura Hotel was the site of the first meeting of the heads of state for the Alliance for Prosperity thus showing that even though Alliance for Prosperity is essentially a military aid plan modeled on "Plan Colombia." Multinational tourism is definitely part of the plan!

How you can help

Readers are asked to call on their Congressional representatives to co-sponsor H.R.5474, the [Berta Caceres Human Rights in Honduras Act](#) bill, which prohibits funds from being made available to Honduras for the police and military – including for equipment and training – and directs the Department of the Treasury to vote against multilateral loans to Honduras for its police and military until the Department of State certifies that the government of Honduras has:

- prosecuted members of the military and police for human rights violations and ensured that such violations have ceased;
- established the rule of law and guaranteed a judicial system capable of bringing to justice members of the police and military who have committed human rights abuses;
- established that it protects the rights of trade unionists, journalists, human rights defenders, government critics and civil society activists to operate without interference;
- withdrawn the military from domestic policing; and
- brought to trial and obtained verdicts against those who ordered and carried out the attack on Felix Molina and the killings of Berta Caceres, Joel Palacios Lino, Elvis Armando Garcia, and over 100 small-farmer activists in the Aguan Valley.

To contact your congressional representatives, visit these sites: [U.S. Senators](#) and [U.S. Representatives](#).



Evicting the Garifuna from Barra Vieja has not been easy despite the David vs. Goliath disparity between the government, working on behalf of the land-greedy tourism developers, and the people. Here, on Sept. 29, 2014, the community succeeded in barring a large police and military force bent on eviction. – Photo: Honduras Accompaniment Project

[Diana Bohn is a member of the Root Causes of Migration delegation, a long time Berkeley resident, member of the City of Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission, board member of the Marin Task force on the Americas, co-coordinator of the Nicaragua Center for Community Action; member of the Bay Area Latin America Solidarity Coalition. She can be reached at nicca@igc.org]

Top Guatemalan beauty spot mired in indigenous rights conflict Dispute over major tourist attraction and conservation area is tearing local communities apart

By David Hill, 17 December 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2016/dec/17/top-guatemalan-beauty-spot-mired-in-indigenous-rights-conflict>

“There’s, like, 50 people on the way up, so take your photos,” said a young American man, shirtless, his face daubed with paint, as he came striding through the forest towards the look-out.

The view was spectacular: lush tropical foliage clinging to the sheer rock-face of a canyon plunging several 100 feet to a series of stunning turquoise pools where tourists could be spotted swimming.

This was Semuc Champey, a must-visit on the Central American backpacker circuit and increasingly one of Guatemala’s most well-known tourist destinations. “Hidden”, “unique” and “natural paradise” are all thrown around to describe it.

[Lonely Planet](#) calls Semuc “arguably the loveliest spot in the country”, while [CNN](#) dubbed the River Cahabón, which flows under the pools, the world’s “third best river for travellers” after the Amazon and Zambezi.

But how many of the tens of 1000s of tourists who visit every year are aware of the years-long social conflict over Semuc?

This includes violations of indigenous people’s land rights, severe division among indigenous communities, allegations of politically-motivated arrests and criminalisation of indigenous authorities, 1000s protesting, fighting with riot police, a recent appeal by the local mayor to the president to install the army in the region, and a general climate of fear, intimidation and suspicion.

Jorge Samayoa, from the Guatemalan Tourism Institute (Inguat), says tourists aren’t aware of the conflict and he is “extremely concerned” it could mean closing Semuc - for a second time. “We don’t have anything else like it and it’s one of our main tourist sites for nature,” he told the

Guardian. "It's part of the country's image. We're worried that at any moment a visitor - Guatemalan or international - could be directly affected, not only economically but physically."

Semuc - or Semuq - Champey is in the Alta Verapaz department in north-central [Guatemala](#). It was identified as a conservation target by a 1989 law and declared a "protected area" and "natural monument" in 2005, and is currently administered by the National Council on Protected Areas (Conap). For several months in 2016 - and for periods before that - it was taken over and run by some members of the four indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' communities in the region, leading Inguat to recommend tourists to steer clear.

That ended in July when, over two days, riot police and soldiers drove them out and recovered government control of the area, firing tear-gas, reportedly shooting in the air, and entering at least two of the communities in the surrounding hills.

"When the police began to throw the tear-gas, we - mothers, with babies - ran into the forest," Doña Concepción, from the Chizubin community, told the Guardian. "We had to escape to protect ourselves. There were children with us crying. Some were intoxicated by the tear-gas. We had to flee because we didn't have any other option."

Police and Conap personnel reported stones being thrown at them and shots being fired. A short film released by Guatemala's Procurador on Human Rights states that three policemen were injured and accuses the communities of responding violently to government attempts at dialogue.

Utz Che, a network of grassroots organisations based south of Guatemala City, disputes that version of events. "A media campaign against the communities says that it was they who were inciting the violence and they are usurping and invading Semuc Champey, when it was the security forces using excessive force and lethal weapons against unarmed community members," reads a statement circulated to journalists. "The communities have always been in favour of dialogue, but local Conap personnel didn't take them seriously. They want to make it clear that they're not invaders and they're on their own property."

According to Utz Che, at least nine young people were injured and many elderly and children were affected by the tear-gas in July. One man from the Santa Maria Semuc Champey community told the Guardian the subsequent death of his uncle, Don Nicolas, was connected to being tear-gassed.

PHOTO: An Q'eqchi' boy in one of the four communities neighbouring Semuc Champey where division is rife over access to and management of the protected area. Photograph: David Hill

Since the July violence warrants have been issued for the arrest of various Q'eqchi's, with Utz Che warning of rumours of requests being made for warrants for at least another 30 people. The charges include usurping a protected area, coercion, incitement to commit crime, and

assaulting security services, but the warrants are seen more as an attempt to undermine and intimidate Q'eqchi' leaders considered threatening to Conap.

"According to information I received yesterday, all our ancestral authorities will have to be arrested," Don Anastasio, in Chizubin, told the Guardian. "Conap has realised that we're organised and know how to defend ourselves."

On 4 December 71 year old Francisco Pop Pop, from the Chicanuz community, and two other Q'eqchi' men were roughly bundled into a pick-up truck and driven to nearby city Cobán, before being released on bail. A warrant for Pop Pop's arrest had been issued, according to Utz Che, but he hadn't been notified and his captors didn't identify themselves.

Pop Pop has been a long-standing critic of Conap and just over a week before he was seized his son, Crisanto Pop Mo, had been involved in a violent incident with a Conap representative, Arnoldo Tec Caal. Accounts of events differ. Pop Mo's wife, Doña Elvira, told the Guardian that Tec Caal was armed and broke into her house at 11:45 pm, but her husband successfully defended himself with a machete by striking and wounding Tec Caal, tying him up and reporting the incident to the police - before himself being detained, imprisoned and then freed on bail.

Guatemalan media presented Pop Mo as the aggressor, with La Hora calling Tec Caal latter a "defender" of Semuc and Prensa Libre describing him as a "defender of conservation."

Just hours before he was captured, Pop Pop had spoken out, at a meeting in Chizubin, against Conap and the warrants for arrest. "We've been persecuted for a very long time and we remain persecuted to this day," he said, just a few hours before he was forced into the pick-up. "We can't leave our communities. They could seize us at any moment. That's our fear."

Asked about allegations that the arrest warrants are politically-motivated, Conap's Otilio Chavez, in Guatemala City, says he is unable to comment. "That's the public prosecutor that's in charge."

Many Q'eqchi' men and women say they now fear being evicted from their communities, or having future use of their land severely restricted. Such fears have numerous grounds, including the way the protected area was established in 2005 without consulting them, Conap's subsequent failure to include them in managing it, threats allegedly made to them by different local people, and reported plans by Conap to "expand" its management reach.

In the mid-1990s the communities coordinated with the local municipality to buy the title to their land, but the municipality put two key "caballerias" - about 90 hectares - in its own name: the very area where the turquoise pools are. Given that the 2005 law establishing Semuc as a protected area makes it 919 hectares, Conap's administration should extend way beyond the municipality-owned 90 hectares - which the Q'eqchi's consider theirs anyway - and into the communities to which they have title.

“Conap is not claiming land ownership. The way Conap works is that they establish protected areas and restrict the rights to certain things, like cutting down trees, even walking, or building roads,” says David Garcia, a Guatemalan anthropologist from the Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontieres which has been facilitating meetings between the communities and Conap. “Basically, they’re taking away the right of self-determination. The Q’eqchi’s would still own [that land], but Conap would have certain rights within it.”

For Don Matteo Chub, though, Conap running Semuc means potential eviction. “The intention is to remove the majority of the people, put the area in its name, and bring in whatever is required so more tourists come,” says Chub, from Santa Maria.

PHOTO: Tourists swimming at one of the pools at Semuc Champey. Photograph: David Hill

Another reason to fear eviction is Conap’s record elsewhere. Andrew Davis, from El Salvador-based NGO Prisma, says Conap has a “very old school” vision of conservation. “You have to displace people. You have to protect nature from people,” says Davis, co-lead author of [a report on conservation in Central America released in Mexico on 8 December which features Semuc as a case-study](#). He calls that vision “ironic”: “the Mayans have protected these forests for 100s of years.”

A further reason for fearing eviction is more general and country-wide: the several centuries-old experience among indigenous peoples in Guatemala of being driven off their land. This continues despite the Constitution which commits to protecting indigenous peoples, and the Peace Accords signed in the 1990s after the civil war - one of which commits specifically to respecting indigenous peoples’ identities and rights. Over the last 15 years the Q’eqchi’s in Alta Verapaz and neighbouring departments have been particularly badly-affected, says Davis, because oil palm has “exploded” and “violent dispossession has been common.”

Conap’s Abel Sandoval, in Cobán, acknowledges that his institution has displaced people in the past, but says it won’t happen with Semuc and dismisses such ideas as rumours encouraged by “bad leaders.” “They have the idea that, because it’s a protected area, it means they have to leave,” he says. “They’ve heard we displaced people from Lachuá [elsewhere in Alta Verapaz], but Lachuá is a national park, Category I, according to the IUCN [International Union for the [Conservation](#) of Nature], and Semuc Champey is a natural monument [Category II]. You can have communities inside.”

Inguat’s Samayoa recognises the Q’eqchi’s concern about potential eviction too, but dismisses it as a possibility. “It’s not like that. They have rights, dating back years, to be in the area, from before it was declared a protected area,” he says. “They have the right, as indigenous peoples, to look after their communal property. Removing them is what enemies of the area, of the government, have said we want to do. That’s false.”

Prisma’s Davis told the Guardian that, even if there are no evictions, concerns about future land-use are understandable. “Even beyond physical expulsion, severe restrictions on

livelihoods and failure to recognize local rights have been common in Guatemala,” he says. “So for a Category II area like [Semuc], in my view, the deep community fears about implications for their lives and livelihoods are not unfounded.”

A key complaint made by the Q’eqchi’s - some of whom say Semuc is sacred to them - is the lack of benefits that its protected area status has brought them, along with the tourist industry developing around it. The 2005 law states that 30% of revenues should be spent on “environmentally friendly projects” to “improve their quality of life”, but 11 years later no such projects exist, according to reports. In August this year congressman Carlos Chavarría Perez presented a bill to increase that share to 40% - 10% for each community - and permit it to be spent on other projects, such as health and education.

“Not one project has been implemented,” says Ernesto Tzi, from Q’eqchi’ organisation Saaq Aach’ool Nimla K’aleba’al (Sank). “Some families try and sell food, but apart from that there has been practically no benefit.”

According to Inguat, 175,335 Guatemalans and 143,184 foreigners visited Semuc between January 2012 and September 2015. Given that the entry fee for Guatemalans and foreigners is 30 and 50 quetzales respectively, that should mean at least 12.4m quetzales (US\$1.6m) in total and 3.7m quetzales (US\$494,364) for the communities have been generated in just the last few years.

Conap’s Chavez acknowledges the lack of benefits, but partly defends it on the grounds that the government has 16 million Guatemalans to consider and the communities haven’t made it clear how the money should be spent. They “must present the projects that they want. We, as Conap don’t decide how to support them,” he says.

Others, like Conap’s Sandoval, say the communities have requested new roofing for their homes and hope it will be delivered in 2017, claiming that any delays are the fault of general government bureaucracy rather than Conap specifically.

Another key complaint is that Semuc was established as a protected area without consulting the communities, as was required under international law binding on Guatemala since the mid-1990s. Semuc is deep in Q’eqchi’ territory and has effectively been managed by them for 100s of years. “My parents were born here. It’s ours. No one consulted us about Conap entering,” says Crisanto Cal Tec in the Semil community. “This land was left to us years ago,” says Doña Luisa in Santa Maria. “It belongs to us.”

Conap’s Sandoval and Inguat’s Samaya both acknowledge that there was no consultation. The latter describes the protected area as “imposed” on the Q’eqchi’s and “one of the errors” made by the government, but claims that neither Inguat nor Conap were consulted either. “They never asked us for our opinion. It was at Congress’s direct initiative. Maybe if it had been done in a participative way we wouldn’t have the problems we have now.”

Division in the communities is rife. Crisanto Chub, in Semil, told the Guardian that 40 families are against Conap managing Semuc and 25 are in favour, and in Chicanuz it is split 50-50, says Crisanto Tec, while in Santa Maria slightly more than half are in favour of Conap, according to community members. Others say it is simply “minorities” who are against Conap, squabbling over money. Those against say those in favour are being duped by Conap promises that it can’t or won’t keep - for the roofing, for schools, for computers, for electricity, for solar panels, for egg-laying hens, for better roads - as well as short-term employment at Semuc or as representatives to a joint-management committee presided over by Conap’s director which is supposed to run the area.

According to Nicolas Chac, from Semil, three people collect money at Semuc’s entrance and 14 work as rangers - all from the communities. Chac, a ranger, told the Guardian that 60% of his community are in favour of Conap, the rest against, and those who recently took over the park were “invaders” and “illegal.”

David Garcia, from Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontieres, says that Conap has contributed to dividing the communities. “They’re not interested in recognising the indigenous authorities. They basically have their own groups within the communities, people that they have hired.” Such divisions reportedly manifest themselves in who can and can’t access the area. A 2014 law states that community members are able to enter free-of-charge, unlike the tourists, but some say Conap employees bar those known to be critical of its management. Chac dismisses that. “They can come in,” he says.

Another key complaint is the failure of the joint-management committee, currently consisting of Conap’s director, the mayor, Inguat, and community members. Inguat’s Samayoa is positive about the committee, emphasising its uniqueness in Guatemala, but it was only formed this year, after the July violence, 11 years after the protected area was established. One community, Chizubin, has not elected a representative, while Utz Che, Sank’s Ernesto Tzi and some members of the other three communities question the legitimacy of the elections and claim they were hurried through in July in order to re-open Semuc after the government had retaken control and then briefly closed it.

Fernando Palomo, director of Conap’s Regional Technical Issues Unit in Guatemala City, defends the elections. “We understand the process to elect the committee was done democratically,” he says.

A 1989 law states that all protected areas in Guatemala must have a management plan, but Semuc has never had one. A plan was recently prepared by Guatemalan NGO Fundacion para el Desarrollo Integral de Hombre y su Entorno (Calmecac), says Conap’s Sandoval, but Conap didn’t approve it. “It was terrible,” he told the Guardian.

Sandoval says he is concerned about the potential impacts of increasing numbers of tourists visiting Semuc, suggesting that visitor numbers should be limited. “There’s no control,” he

argues. “There’s no management plan, no visitors’ management plan, no ecological capacity plan.”

Numerous Q’eqchi’ men and women now say they want to administer Semuc by themselves, without Conap, and defend how they ran it earlier in the year. They created many more jobs than Conap, they claim, including for the elderly and women who might otherwise find it hard to obtain work.

“We don’t want to see Conap here. As the ancestral authorities from the four communities, it is we who need to administer these areas because they belong to us,” says Don Santiago in Santa Maria.

Utz Che is urging Conap to prioritise participation with local communities, rather than classify them as “enemies of conservation.” “The conservation model imposed by Conap continues to exclude communities in managing resources and living within protected areas,” the organization states.

For Conap’s Sandoval co-management with the communities is the objective: “That’s our dream.” For Samayoa, who says Inguat is considering proposing Semuc as a Unesco “Patrimony of Humanity”, it is a “new experience” which he hopes can be a “model” for other protected areas in the country. For others, such as Conap’s Chavez, co-management is already happening: the joint-management committee meets once a month, he says.

Conap promotional material states that Semuc Champey means “where the river hides beneath the earth” in the Q’eqchi language. It describes it as a “natural stone bridge 300 metres long” above which have formed “natural pools of different sizes” fed by “crystal clear spring waters” running from the canyon - not the River Cahabón. “The water color in the pools has different tones of turquoise and changes depending on the time of year,” it says.

Some signs around Semuc bear the logo of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), although the one at the main entrance has had the logo cut out. According to Inguat’s Samayoa, some years ago USAID improved the infrastructure, such as pathways, bridges and the lookout. Calmecac’s rejected management plan states that in 2004 the US Department of the Interior’s International Technical Assistance Program, together with USAID, prepared a Public Use Plan for the area.

“USAID does not currently have any development activities in Semuc Champey Natural Monument,” USAID told the Guardian. “From 2003-2007 our Q’eqchi’ Maya Community Development & Sustainable Tourism project worked in the area to help promote sustainable tourism and agro-forestry conservation. The sign[s] may have been a legacy from this project.”

Semuc is just one of several case-studies in the recently published [report by the NGO Prisma, titled Lessons for Mesoamerica: Conservation and Community Rights](#). It argues that the conservation movement is now at a “crossroads”, having for many years failed to acknowledge

indigenous peoples' rights and then adopting a "new paradigm" in 2003 which remains "largely unimplemented." Recommendations include recognising indigenous rights in national legislation and conservation policy, and obtaining their free, prior and informed consent when developing protected areas.

Regarding Semuc specifically, the Prisma report states that, after more than a decade, 2016 has been the year when "tensions culminated" between the communities and Conap. "Recognizing the rights of the communities is the most productive way forward," Prisma's Davis says. "It would address the core of the dispute and ensure that the management of the area would actually respond to the aspirations and values of the Q'eqchi communities that have conserved the area for generations."

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The exploitation and poverty, violence and government repression, corruption and impunity of Honduras and Guatemala are "American" and "Canadian" issues. The U.S. and Canadian governments, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, and North American companies and investors (including pension funds) maintain profitable economic and military relations with the Guatemalan and Honduran regimes, turning a blind eye and/or directly contributing to environmental harms, exploitation, repression, corruption and impunity that are the norm in these countries, that force so many to flee.

Keep on sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to your politicians and media, to your pension and investment funds, asking: Why our governments, companies and investment firms benefit from and turn a blind eye to the poverty, repression and violence, and environmental and health harms in Guatemala and Honduras?

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