

Rights Action

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May 2021

Working & struggling NOT 'to get back to normal'

Pre-Covid, during Covid, post-Covid, Guatemala and Honduras are ruled by military-backed, corrupt, open-for-global-business regimes, "democratic allies" of the US, Canada & "international community"

Dear friends,

We apologize for the delay in sending this newsletter. It was not due to a lack of busy-ness.

Thank-you very much for your donations and grants in 2020 and into 2021. (See updated summary, below) We believe that Rights Action funds sent to community-based partner groups in Guatemala and Honduras have saved lives.

Piled on top of the fact that Central America has long been an oppressed region in our unjust, unequal global human order and nation-state system, 2020 brought the ravages of COVID and then Hurricanes Eta and Iota in November. Subsistence and survival were the orders of the day, ... of the year.

On top of all this, corrupt global companies and investors – backed by the US and Canadian governments and their "democratic allies" in Guatemala and Honduras – pressed forward with forced evictions and illegal land grabs, repression and human rights violations. No rest for the weary.

"The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."

—Thomas Friedman

In the archives section of our website (<https://rightsaction.org/archives>), find updated information on a number of the long-term community defense struggles we have been supporting. Over the next months, more archives will be added.

(continued)

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS:

Make checks payable to "Rights Action" and mail to the appropriate US or Canadian office.

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FULL-TIME STAFF

Grahame Russell

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Matthew Simpson
Scott Wright
Camila Rich

GET INFORMED/ GET INVOLVED

Speakers: Invite us to give presentations about these issues

Educational Delegations:

Form your own group or join one of our educational-solidarity delegation seminars to Guatemala and Honduras to learn more about these issues and struggles

Daily News:

- www.democracynow.org
- www.thecanadafilms.com

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“Democratic allies” infiltrated by organized crime

Even as COVID and Hurricanes Eta and Iota ravaged the lives of a majority of Hondurans and Guatemalans, ever more information was made public about how drug cartels and organized crime gangs operate in the highest offices of the governments of Guatemala and Honduras, including the police, military, judiciary and executive and legislative branches of government.

The degree of drug trafficking and organized crime infiltration into the Honduran and Guatemalan governments and State would be worthy of a Hollywood film, were these regimes not so utterly dependent on and dominated by the US (principally), as well as by Canada and other governments and actors in the “international community”, and a host of North American companies and investors.

‘Juan Orlando Hernandez may be a narco-trafficking son of a bitch, but he is our narco-trafficking son of a bitch’

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt reportedly said: “Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he’s our son of a bitch”, referring to the ruthless military dictator of Nicaragua the US government was propping up.

One can imagine US and Canadian leaders saying: ‘Juan Orlando Hernandez is a narco-trafficking son of a bitch, but he is our narco-trafficking son of a bitch’, referring to the military-backed, drug-trafficking President of Honduras, propped up in power by the US, Canada and other actors in the “international community” since (pretty much) the June 28, 2009 military coup ousted Honduras’ last democratically elected government.

“Be nice to America, or we’ll bring democracy to your country.”

—Bumper sticker

View our Narco States archives (<https://rightsaction.org/narco-states-archives>) for media coverage and reports, including extensive information about State-sponsored drug trafficking in Honduras overseen by President Juan Orlando Hernandez.

It remains an urgent and long overdue responsibility of the US and Canadian public, and our institutions (courts, political oversight bodies, media), to begin to hold our governments and companies legally accountable for policies and programs that empower, enable and benefit from the endemic violence, harms and suffering in countries like Honduras and Guatemala.

“The history of the underdevelopment of Latin America makes up the history of the development of world capitalism. Our defeat was always implicit in another’s victory; our wealth has always generated our poverty, in order to feed the prosperity of others.”

—Eduardo Galeano

“Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”

—Paolo Freire

"A Rot in Honduras That Goes All the Way to the Top"



Background article by Hilary Goodfriend (*Jacobin Magazine*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/05/berta-caceres-murder-honduras-nina-lakhani>) about the justice struggle for the March 2, 2016 assassination of Berta Cáceres. Spearheaded by Berta's children and the COPINH organization, the courageous trial continues today against the intellectual authors of Berta's assassination – the oligarchic Atala family that likely ordered and paid for the assassination team.

"The question "who killed Berta Cáceres?" has several answers: there's the hit men who pulled the trigger, the corporate bosses who ordered the hit, the narco-state that fostered crooked industries, and the imperialist power that propped up the narco-state and trained its mercenaries."

The "Rot in Honduras" goes through to Honduras' international partners, primarily the US, with Canada, the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Spain and the EU, International Monetary Fund and a host of global corporations. The Honduran regime remains in power today because of:

- US and Canadian support for June 28, 2009 military coup, that ousted Honduras' last democratically elected government;
- ensuing 12 years of economic, political and military support from US, Canada and so-called "international community".

(continued)

Forced migrancy and refugee flight

It should not be surprising that there will be no end, in the near future, to the forced migrancy and refugee flight of ever more Hondurans, Guatemalans and, increasingly again, Salvadorans, escaping the violence, corruption and deep impoverishment of their corrupt, exploitative, repressive regimes.

View our Forced Migrancy archives (<https://rightsaction.org/forced-migrancy-archives>) for media coverage and reports. Note the contrast between mainstream media reports that generally refuses to address underlying causes, and other reporting that analyzes how the policies and programs of the US (and also Canada, multi-national companies, etc.) contribute to the underlying causes of forced migrancy and refugee flight.

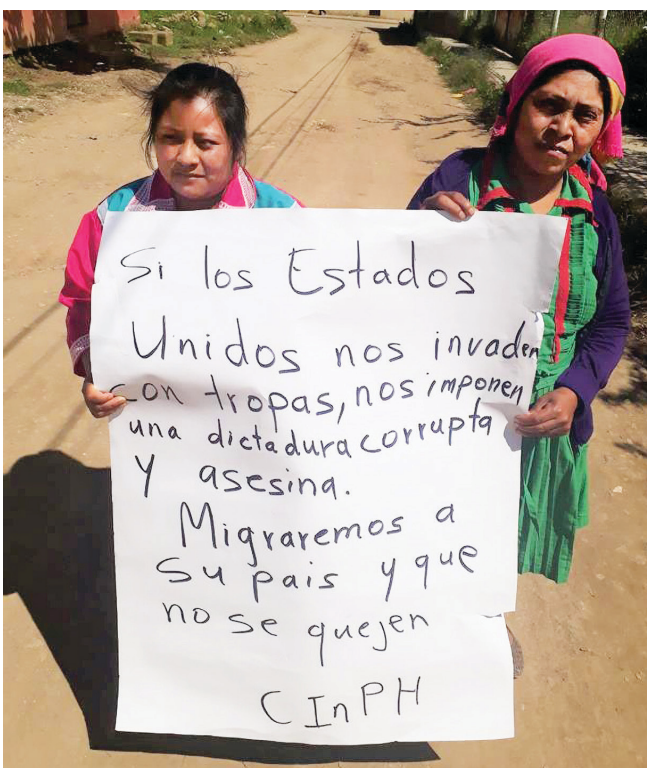
Not “failed states”

Even with the infiltration of drug trafficking and organized crime, and the endless forced migrancy and refugee flight, Guatemala and Honduras are not “failed states”, as some media pundits and “experts” claim.

They are corrupt, repressive, open-for-global-business regimes doing what the Honduran and Guatemalan elites, and their partners in the US, Canada and so-called “international community” want them to do.

Thank you for your on-going trust and support for our work, and the work and struggles of our community defense partner groups. Please send your questions and comments my way.

Grahame Russell, director,
grahame@rightsaction.org



“If the US invades our countries, and imposes on us corrupt, murderous dictators, we will migrate to your country and you should stop complaining.”

**—CInPH - Indigenous Coordinator of
Popular Power in Honduras**



Testimonio: Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of Genocides in Guatemala

Edited by Catherine Nolin & Grahame Russell

In October 2021, *Between the Lines* will publish *Testimonio*, that was put together and edited by Catherine Nolin and Grahame Russell, who also have articles included. *Testimonio* was dropped by its first publisher, Springer Nature, over libel chill threats of lawsuits.

Between the Lines to publish mining book dropped by Springer Nature over libel chill

<https://quillandquire.com/omni/between-the-lines-to-publish-mining-book-dropped-by-nature-springer-over-libel-chill/>

A book about Canadian mining in Guatemala that was dropped by its European publisher over potential legal concerns last year will be published this fall by *Between the Lines*.

“Testimonio: Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of Genocides in Guatemala” is described as a collection of essays, news reports, and testimonials about the actions of Canadian mining companies in the Central American country. Edited by University of Northern British Columbia professor Catherine Nolin and Rights Action director Grahame Russell, *Testimonio* had been slated for publication by Switzerland-based Springer Nature.

In an open letter to Springer Nature last November, Nolin and Russell described how they had entered into a publishing agreement in 2017 and submitted their final manuscript in February 2020. After positive initial feedback, Nolin and Russell say in their open letter that they didn't hear from anyone at Springer Nature until July, when the publishing editor told them in an email that the book contained “unsubstantiated defamatory content” and said Springer Nature would be unable to publish it.

Nolin and Russell say the publisher didn't reply to their emails asking for clarification, although eventually their editor told them that the publisher could be sued for defamation by “the third party” if the book were to be published.

BTL managing editor Amanda Crocker said in an email that the Toronto-based publisher reached out to Nolin and Russell after reading a news story about their book being dropped. After a conversation with BTL over Zoom,

Nolin and Russell decided to submit their manuscript to BTL's editorial committee, which “felt strongly that the book should be published,” Crocker said.

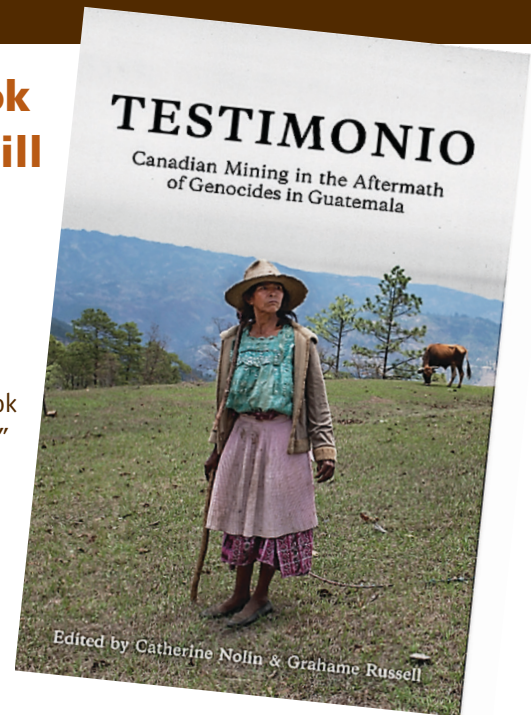
“It's concerning when authors do years of research to produce well-documented accounts of the actions of powerful corporations (mining and otherwise) and then have difficulty finding a publisher to make this work available to readers,” Crocker said.

“Part of what this book's editors demonstrate in the book is that violating human rights, using repression, and acting with corruption and impunity is how the Canadian-dominated mining industry has operated in Guatemala.”

“Part of what this book's editors demonstrate in the book is that violating human rights, using repression, and acting with corruption and impunity is how the Canadian-dominated mining industry has operated in Guatemala. If no publisher will publish the book then this has just compounded the problem of getting at the truth.”

Publication date: October 25, 2021

<https://btlbooks.com/book/testimonio>





Dianna Ortiz, presente!

Dianna Ortiz – 1989 torture victim of US-backed Guatemalan military regime – has died after a short illness

Rights Action honors and remembers Dianna Ortiz, a shining light of a person, survivor of being disappeared and brutally tortured by the US-backed Guatemalan military regime in 1989. We remember Dianna, a courageous advocate for the rights and needs of torture survivors, an advocate working to hold the US government accountable for its direct role in the atrocities and mass killings in Guatemala.

“On Nov. 2, 1989, assailants Sister Ortiz identified as Guatemalan security forces abducted her from a convent retreat-house garden in Antigua and drove her to a detention center in Guatemala City. Targeted for working with the Indigenous community – which the military had long brutalized for presumed left-wing sympathies – she said she was blindfolded and raped by three captors.

“They burned her with cigarettes as they demanded names of Indigenous subversives, she said; a doctor who later examined her counted 111 burn marks. She was lowered into a pit with rats and decomposing bodies and later forced to dismember another captive with a machete. She was told the killing was photographed and videotaped, to be used as blackmail if Sister Ortiz attempted to seek redress, she said.

“About a day into her imprisonment, a fourth man, called Alejandro but whose accented Spanish led her to believe that he was American, entered the torture chambers and ordered the others to stop. He said Sister Ortiz’s disappearance was making headlines in the local and American media. She said Alejandro apologized to her for what he claimed was a case of mistaken identity. During a ride to what he said was a safe haven – and what she assumed would be the place of her execution – the man advised her strongly to forget what had happened. She jumped out at a traffic stop and hid inside a store before calling members of her religious community to rescue her.”

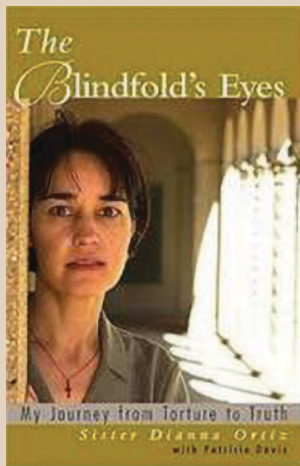
(Washington Post, Feb. 19, 2021, by Ryan Di Corpo, “Dianna Ortiz, nun who told of brutal abduction by Guatemalan military, dies”, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/dianna-ortiz-nun-who-told-of-brutal-abduction-by-guatemalan-military-dies-at-62/2021/02/19/932ac25a-713a-11eb-85fa-e0ccb3660358_story.html)

I first learned of and met Dianna in the early 1990s when living in Guatemala, working with EPICA (Ecumenical Program on Central America). When we moved to Washington DC in 1995, and I began work with Rights Action (then Guatemala Partners), my work overlapped with Dianna, and her network of friends and colleagues in the GHRC (Guatemala Human Rights Commission), TASSC (Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International), Assisi Community, the Dorothy Day catholic center.

We send our heartfelt sympathies and respect to Dianna’s family and loved ones, her dear friends and colleagues in the Assisi community, at TASSC, GHRC and Pax Christi.

We thank Dianna for her extraordinary courage, dignity and humanity.

Grahame Russell



The Blindfold’s Eyes: My Journey From Torture to Truth

By Sister Dianna Ortiz
and Patricia Davis,
Orbis Books

Watch interview:

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?160520-1/guatemala>

Your funds at work



In 2021, we continue to fund emergency relief work for on-going COVID hardships and rebuilding after Hurricanes ETA & IOTA, and we keep on supporting community-led land and environment, human rights and justice struggles:

2020 funding summary, see December 2020 newsletter: <https://rightsaction.org/newsletters>

GUATEMALA

Community defense struggles

- Parlamento Xinka & CODIDENA, resisting harmful mining & manipulated consultation process, Pan American Silver (formerly Tahoe Resource)
- 'Gremial' of Q'eqchi' fisherpeople, resisting harmful mining & manipulated consultation process, Solway Investment Group
- Criminal trial, Mynor Padilla, Highbay Minerals head of security
- Landmark Highbay Minerals lawsuits, Canada
- Legal defense, community defenders, victims of 'criminalizations'
- Legal defense, harms by now closed Goldcorp Inc. mine, and Pan American Silver harms in La Cuchilla village
- Legal defense, Maria Cuc Choc, criminalization May 6 hearing
- Council of Q'eqchi' Peoples, challenging manipulated consultation process
- German Chub, health support, paralysis victim of Highbay Minerals shooting
- Chaabil Choch village land defense, Constitutional Court hearing

Education scholarships

- El Estor, children of Q'eqchi' community defenders
- Rio Negro/Pacux refugee community, children of Achi genocide victims

- Rio Negro, law studies, Achi justice defender
- San Miguel Ixtahuacan, law studies, Mam community defender

Community development

- ACPC Achi community organization, Xesiguan village, organic self-sufficiency agriculture
- Rio Negro Achi community, potable water system
- COVID / Hurricanes ETA & IOTA
- Campur community, Alta Verapaz
- ACDIP popular organization, Peten
- El Estor land defenders, Izabal
- Patulul community, Suchitepequez
- Refugee support, forced migrants, Achi people, Baja Verapaz

Truth, Memory, Justice

- Commemoration, Feb.2, 1982, World Bank/IDB's Chixoy dam Xococ massacre
- Commemoration, Mar.13, 1982, World Bank/IDB's Chixoy dam Rio Negro massacre
- COCAHICH, Chixoy Dam reparations campaign
- CIRMA, Center for Mesoamerican Research
- Carlos Ernesto, Prensa Comunitaria, reporting: Impacts of natural disasters; mining resistance, Solway Investment Group

HONDURAS

- Azacualpa Environmental Committee, resisting cemetery & community destruction, Aura Minerals
- Berta Caceres family, security & justice struggle
- Commemoration, Mar.2, 2016 assassination, Berta Caceres
- Guapinol community resisting harmful mining; freedom for political prisoners

(continued)

- OFRANEH Garifuna land & rights defender organization, resisting harms, tourism operators, African palm producers; SUNLA investigation into Honduran State forced disappearance of 5 community defenders
- PROHN-Net, reporting, drug-trafficking trials against Honduran regime leaders
- Refugee support, victims of repression, asylum in Canada
- Refugee support, forced migrants, asylum in USA

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COVID / HURRICANES ETA & IOTA

- Siria Valley Committee, Francisco Morazan
- Mujeres Ambientalistas Progresenas, El Progreso

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OTHER COUNTRIES

- Chiapas, health support, Gustavo Castro, victim of attempted killing during assassination of Berta Caceres

- El Salvador, Jocoaitique ex-combatants committee, COVID relief
- El Salvador, Herbert Anaya Sanabria Collective, January 16 'Acto de Desagravio', El Mozote, Morazan

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NORTH-SOUTH EDUCATION, INVESTIGATIONS, ACTIVISM

- "Testimonio: Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of Genocides in Guatemala", edited by Catherine Nolin & Grahame Russell. Formatting book, to be published by Between The Lines
- GHRC, Guatemala Human Rights Commission, human rights defenders program

"Action is the mother of hope"

"Accion es la madre de la esperanza"

—Pablo Neruda



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