

# Rights Action

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May 2023

## **“Guatemala is Designed for Impunity” Newsweek Magazine Reveals U.S. Government and Canadian Company Plot to Take Control of Nickel Mine on Maya Q’eqchi’ Land**

### **Plaintiffs in Hudbay Minerals Lawsuits Face Alarming Health and Food Security Situation**

Dear friends,

We hope this finds you all well. We share some of what we are up to in 2023.



#### **Importance of Grassroots Funding**

*(April 2023 commentary by Grahame Russell, sent to a Donor’s Conference)*

Thank-you for asking for these brief reflections. My thoughts on ‘grassroots funding’ are based on years of work with Rights Action.

As some may know, there are two main aspects to Rights Action’s work. Since 1995, Rights Action has funded and supported community defense struggles, and community development projects mainly in Guatemala and Honduras. Rights Action also provides relief funds (hurricanes, victims of repression and evictions, Covid19, etc.).

By “community defense struggles”, I refer broadly to community-led struggles in defense of land and environment, justice and human rights.

In most cases, the community defense struggles we support are in resistance to the violence, harms, and corruption of different sectors of the global economy: mining, hydro-electric dams, ‘for-export’ food production, tourism, the maquiladora ‘sweatshop’ clothing industry.

Secondly, Rights Action educates in Canada and the U.S., and works to hold legally and politically accountable the U.S. and Canadian governments, our transnational companies, investors and banks, and global “development” banks (i.e., World Bank), that help cause and profit from exploitation and poverty, repression and human rights violations, environmental harms, corruption, and impunity in countries like Honduras and Guatemala.

Through these two aspects of our work, Rights Action is contributing, over the years, to medium and long-term struggle and work to transform how we humans live together in our unjust and unequal local-to-global economic and political orders, on our one and only planet – the ‘pale blue dot’ (with a nod to Carl Sagan) we call earth.

*(continued)*

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**Directly Funding Community Defenders**

It is hard to overstate the importance of getting funds – regularly, however so small the amount – directly to community-based (‘frontline’, ‘grassroots’) land and environment, human rights and justice defenders.

It is not a question of money being the solution to the underlying, local-to-global causes of the harms and violences they suffer. There are many other facets of struggle and activism that need to be carried out from the local to global levels, in conjunction with directly supporting the community defenders.

However, the fact is that a majority of land and environment, rights and justice defenders around the world – particularly in ‘global south’ countries like Honduras and Guatemala – live in inter-generational conditions of exploitation and poverty, violence and corruption to begin with.

When they are further victimized by land dispossession, systemic exploitation and human rights violations (usually in relation to one or more sectors of the global economy), it makes their pre-existing life conditions even worse.

It is also a fact that community defenders will struggle to stay in their communities, on their lands, defending their rights and environment as best they can, without outside support. In most cases they literally have no options. They are indeed struggling for their lives, however so impoverished and vulnerable they might be.

Getting them small amounts of funds – a small measure of economic restorative justice, in and of itself – simply helps them do more of this.

**What Do They Use Funds For?**

Funds are not used for salaries, rent, honorariums, etc.

For the most part, community defenders use funds for the basics: buying phones; buying data for their phones, to enable communication; paying transportation and food costs, when there are gatherings of defenders and community members; carrying out protest and advocacy activities; supporting victims of human rights violations (including when there are deaths and injuries); in the case of forced evictions, securing basic food and shelter for the victims; supporting defenders who have been arbitrarily jailed on trumped up charges; etc.

Since 1995, most of the funds Rights Action has sent to our community-based partner groups go to covering these types of expenses.



**Why is Biden recycling failed strategies to slow immigration?**

*(Los Angeles Times article, by Jean Guerrero)*

**Read:** <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/biden-recycling-failed-strategies-to-slow-immigration>

“So far, the Biden administration continues to rely on the useless strategy of trying to curb immigration by encouraging investment from international corporations. [...] Countless people leave rural areas of Mexico and Central America because they’re forcibly evicted from lands while witnessing the murder of loved ones for resisting the takeover by corporations and drug cartels working with foreign investors.” *Jean Guerrero*

“[Forced migrants] are literally getting on pickup trucks, trains, transport trucks or walking across the lowlands of their countries, through these vast plantations, trying to get to the very place that all of these products are being exported to.” *Grahame Russell*

## ALL IS NOT WELL IN GUATEMALA, RULED BY U.S. AND CANADIAN-BACKED 'PACTO DE CORRUPOTOS' (COVENANT OF THE CORRUPT)



Wall in the Diario Militar historic memory museum. Photos of pages from the "military diary" documenting 198 Guatemalans kidnapped, disappeared, tortured, and – in most cases – executed and dumped in clandestine graves around the country.

For decades, Guatemala has been controlled (often ruthlessly) by the elite military, economic, and political sectors known as the Pacto de Corruptos – the Covenant of the Corrupt. Today, the Pacto de Corruptos is as well entrenched in power as any time in recent history.

In a moving El Faro news interview, the persecuted, now exiled Judge Miguel Angel Galvez details how the Pacto de Corruptos dismantled the Diario Militar (Military Diary) war crimes trial.

**Read:** <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/guatemala-is-designed-for-impunity>

### Takeover of the Legal System

Judge Galvez explains that the dismantling of the Diario Militar case is the latest in a multi-year campaign of persecution by the Pacto de Corruptos to take over the legal system and use it as a tool of repression

against judges, lawyers and prosecutors, against media outlets and reporters, and always against indigenous land and rights defenders across the country.

**Read more:** <https://rightsaction.org/other-war-crimes-trials-archives>

### Elections and Still No Democracy in Guatemala

As if the takeover of the legal system was not enough, this El Faro article details how the Pacto de Corruptos took over the electoral system.

**Read:** <https://elfaro.net/en/202303/centroamerica/26788/Exclusion-of-Presidential-Candidates-Stains-June-Guatemalan-Elections.htm>

In lead up to the June 2023 elections, there is no way that the Pacto de Corruptos will permit elections to change anything in the country. The dismal exclamation point to this is that Zury Rios, conservative daughter of former U.S.-backed 'Genocidal General' Efraín Rios Montt, is slated to win the presidency with, of course, the support of the Pacto de Corruptos.

**Read more: Elections and No Democracy in Guatemala Archives:** <https://rightsaction.org/election-archives>

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## “Democratic Allie”

Knowing all this, the U.S. and Canada maintain full economic, political and military relations with the Pacto de Corruptos. In this article, Grahame Russell contextualizes a Newsweek Magazine report about how the U.S. government and Central America Nickel Inc. (Quebec, Canada) plotted to take back Canadian control over a longtime violent nickel mine in Guatemala.

**Read:** <https://mailchi.mp/rights-action/us-government-canadian-mining-company-plot-nickel-mine-takeover-in-guatemala>

The Maya Q’eqchi’ people appear condemned to suffer ever more human rights violations and evictions, environmental harms and corruption caused by yet another global mining company operating an illegitimate mine on stolen lands.



Zury Rios and her father, the late Efraim Rios Montt, U.S.-backed general in 1970s and 80s, found guilty by Supreme Court of Justice of being intellectual author of crime of genocide against the Maya Ixil people.



Mining is just one more sector in a long history of violent, exploitive economic imperialism in Central America.

## Plaintiffs in Highbay Minerals Lawsuits Face Alarming Health and Food Security Situation

As the Highbay lawsuits continue into their 13th year in Canadian courts, Rights Action recently published this appeal:

- Emergency medical report/request sent by Q'eqchi' plaintiffs involved in lawsuits
- Prensa Libre news article: "There is no food at all: Cahaboncito is the village in Panzós with highest levels of famine, where malnutrition hits children"

**Read:** <https://mailchimp/rightsaction/highbay-lawsuits-plaintiffs-face-alarming-health-food-security-situation>

Since the beginning of the lawsuits, and continuing today, Rights Action does our best to provide the plaintiffs with minimal funding to respond to the various causes of their chronic poverty and suffering, including the devastation and loss caused by Hurricanes ETA and IOTA in 2020, by COVID and lack of government response, and by regular flooding of the Cahabon river caused by climate change and a hydro-electric dam project.



The Prensa Libre article features Amalia Tiul, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuits, addressing issues of hunger and famine in her village of Cahaboncito where she and 10 other plaintiffs have lived since being evicted from their home community of Lote 8 in 2007.

(Photo: Roberto López)



## Take Action Against U.S. Interference With Reforms and Change in Honduras

The Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN) released a report authored by Karen Spring (director of Honduras Now, co-coordinator of the HSN, previous Rights Action colleague) documenting U.S. pressures against reforms being made by the Honduran government as it attempts to recover from 12 years and 7 months of a U.S. and Canadian-backed, 'open-for-global-business', narco-dictatorship.

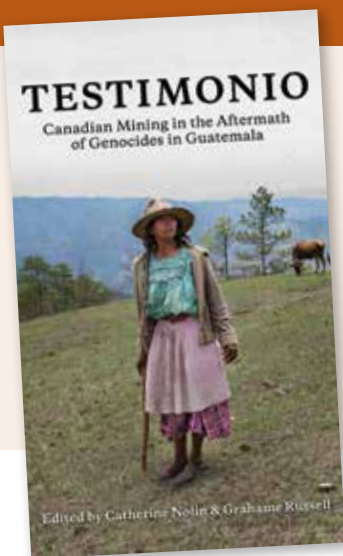
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**TESTIMONIO-Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of Genocides in Guatemala**

Edited by Catherine Nolin & Grahame Russell

[www.testimoniothebook.org](http://www.testimoniothebook.org)

