

Rights Action

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December 2018

Refugee-producing countries: Honduras & Guatemala

Refugee-producing “international community”

Dear friends,

Greetings and best wishes for a peaceful and happy year's end, and new year.

As supporters of Rights Action (and similar groups) know, desperate people have been fleeing corrupt, exploitative, violent regimes in Central America for generations; people have fled U.S.-backed military interventions for generations. Canada got in on the action in 2009 supporting the military coup in Honduras that has resulted in 9 years of extreme violence and suffering for many Hondurans.



Photo @ Guillermo Arias.

1000s of (mainly) Hondurans flee corrupt, repressive, violent regimes in their home countries, walking north in early November 2018, through Mexico to the U.S. border.

- **Your funds at work:** <http://rightsaction.org/your-donations-at-work/>
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Now the number of people fleeing—in caravans or separately—has spiked again, particularly from Honduras. By design, Guatemala and Honduras are refugee producing countries. Rarely addressed or held accountable is the role of the refugee-producing “international community”.

Elephant in the room

For generations, governments and economic actors in the “international community” have maintained beneficial political, military, economic relations with Honduras and Guatemala. The U.S. is the most notable culprit; the governments of Canada and certain European Union countries have rarely wavered in their support. The World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (investment banks controlled by the wealthy counties), and many global companies and investors maintain profitable economic relations with the corrupt, repressive elites of both countries.

One is often told by the media, politicians or ‘experts’ that the “international community” is concerned about crime,

(continued)

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violence, poverty and {fill-in-the-space} in Honduras, in Guatemala, etc., *with absolutely no discussion* of how other governments and global economic actors are sometimes directly responsible for these endemic problems as well.

The power and wealth of the Honduran and Guatemalan economic, political, military elites derive mainly from their multiple relations with the “international community”; their power and wealth do not derive democratically from the will of the people.



Photo: Google photos.

Various U.S. and Canadian leaders glad-handing and legitimizing post Honduran military coup leaders Porfirio Lobo and Juan Orlando Hernandez, presidents of repressive, corrupt governments infiltrated by organized crime, including drug-trafficking.

“International community” resistance struggles

For 23 years, Rights Action has supported communities in Honduras and Guatemala in their human rights, environmental and territorial defense struggles, in their truth and justice struggles. *Pretty much every one of these struggles* has been or is in response to human rights violations, forced evictions, environmental harms, exploitation and repression carried out by the Honduran and Guatemalan political-economic-military elites *in partnership* with international banks, companies and investors that, themselves, are supported by their home governments, primarily in the U.S., Canada and E.U.

Refugee producing global economic / political model

Here, a summary of some community struggles Rights Action supports, past and present, that illustrate the role of other governments and global economic actors in helping create and profit from the conditions that force people to flee.

Chixoy hydro-electric dam

For over 15 years, Rights Action supported victim-survivors of the 1982 Chixoy dam massacres that killed over 440 people from the Mayan Achi village of Rio Negro and forcibly evicted 32 Mayan communities. This repression was carried out by the U.S.-backed military regimes of generals Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt, in support of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank’s Chixoy dam project.

No justice was done for the intellectual authors of these atrocities. A partial reparations plan was achieved after an extraordinary 20 year struggle (supported substantially by Rights Action). The World Bank and IDB profited from their investments of 100s of millions of dollars in this “development” project, arrogantly avoiding any political or legal accountability.

Mining

Over the last 15 years, Rights Action has supported communities suffering and resisting evictions, killings and repression, environmental and health harms, linked to Canadian and U.S. companies: Goldcorp Inc. (Guatemala and Honduras); Aura Minerals (Honduras); Hudbay Minerals/ Skye Resources/ INCO (Guatemala); Tahoe Resources (Guatemala); KCA/Radius Gold (Guatemala).



Investors in these mines including U.S. and Canadian pension funds, shareholders, private investors, the World Bank, trusts and endowments. Do you know what your funds are invested in, profiting from?

With the hugely important exceptions of the landmark Hudbay Minerals and Tahoe Resources lawsuits, working their ways slowly through Canadian courts, no justice or accountability has been done in Honduras, Guatemala, Canada or the U.S. for any of the mining-caused violence and killings, harms and evictions.

Tourism

Since before the U.S. and Canadian-backed military coup in Honduras (2009), and worsening since then, Canadian and U.S. tourism investors have used and benefitted from government and judicial corruption, violence and forced evictions to take control of indigenous Garifuna lands, and built condos and holiday enclaves for North American and European tourists.

“Own a piece of the Caribbean”: This onslaught continues today, even as a OFRANEH (leading Garifuna rights organization supported by Rights Action since 1998) politically and legally resists and denounces every illegal and violent incursion.

Dams

Beyond the Chixoy dam massacres and “development project” crimes, Rights Action has supported other communities in Guatemala and Honduras suffering and resisting evictions and repression caused by internationally-financed dam projects. The most well-known case is that of the Lenca people in western Honduras resisting the illegal and internationally funded Agua Zarca dam that resulted in the assassination of Berta Caceres and attempted assassination of Gustavo Castro.

In a country of spectacularly entrenched corruption and impunity, the trial against the material authors of Berta’s assassination and wounding of Gustavo Castro is painstakingly going forward. No justice has been done at all for the role of the intellectual authors and funders (national or international) of her killing, let alone many other attacks (and killings) that COPINH members have suffered. Rights Action has been a steady supporter of COPINH, co-founded by Berta in 1992, since 1998.

African palm

In the Aguan region of northern Honduras, and Polochic region of eastern Guatemala, Rights Action has provided emergency response funding to family members of people killed and communities violently evicted by wealthy elites using soldiers, police and hired guns to take control of their lands for the production of African palm. Demand for African palm has spiked as a source of “green energy” biofuel. The World Bank has been a major investor/ profiteer.

Honduras military coup and aftermath

Since the U.S. and Canadian military coup of 2009, Rights Action has doubled our work in Honduras, supporting long-term partners COPINH and OFRANEH, and other community groups protesting the coup and the now three sets of fraudulent, stolen elections (2009, 2013, 2017). During these nine years, levels of government killings and repression, criminalizations and jailings of political prisoners, generalized violence and murder, have spiked to their highest levels in Honduran history.

The illegitimate Honduran regime would never have lasted in power, but for the political, economic and military relations maintained with certain governments (particularly the U.S. and Canada) and numerous economic actors in the “international community”.

Fundamental inter-connectedness and co-responsibility

The point is that each of these situations of economic exploitation, political repression, fraudulent elections, etc., involves the direct or indirect participation of governments and economic actors from the “international community”.

The point is that each of these situations contributes directly to why 10s of 1000s of Hondurans and Guatemalans are forced to flee, year after year.

In Honduras and Guatemala, no matter how hard people and communities work legally and politically to restore fair elections and real democracy, and to have their human rights, territories and local environment respected, as long as their economic, political and military elites maintain beneficial relations with other governments and a host of economic actors in the “international community”, the Honduran and Guatemalan regimes will use repression, corruption and impunity to keep in place their exploitative and violent economic models ... that force 10s of 1000s of people to flee every year.

There’s the rub. There’s the fundamental inter-connectedness, the fundamental co-responsibility.

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This is what Rights Action—and partner groups north and south—works to address and change, one struggle at a time, all at the same time.

Our plan?

In 2019, we continue with the same fundamental elements of our work:

- funding community organizations and individuals spear-heading human rights and environmental protection struggles, territorial and community defense, and justice struggles;
- funding people suffering political repression and killings, suffering health harms caused by the violently imposed economic model;
- carrying out and supporting north-south education, activism and justice work, exposing and attempting to hold accountable the U.S. and Canadian governments and North American companies and investors that contribute to and benefit from endemic exploitation and poverty, repression, environmental destruction, corruption and impunity, in places like Honduras and Guatemala.

Thank-you for your trust and support. I appreciate receiving your questions and comments.

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