

May 6, 2000

**CHIXOY DAM REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN:
To Get Reparations from the World Bank
& the Inter-American Development Bank
For Survivors of the Communities Affected
by Construction of the Chixoy Dam in Guatemala**

Communique #1

Rights Action, along with the International Rivers Network and the Italy-based Reform the World Bank Campaign, is initiating an international campaign to have the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank provide full and proper compensation and reparations to the survivors of the Rio Negro community (Baja Verapaz, Guatemala), who were forcibly and mercilessly displaced from their home community, to make way for the construction of the Chixoy Dam project, 1975-1985. More than 440 Rio Negro townspeople were massacred. Most survivors live in conditions of poverty and psychological trauma today.

Communique #1 sets out a brief background to this Reparations Campaign. At this point and time, we are not calling for action. Thank-you for reading and widely distributing this information. We trust that we can count on your support if and when we need public action. Please contact us with your questions and comments.

Sincerely,

Grahame Russell, 416-654-2074, info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org

CHIXOY DAM REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN

History

In 1954, the US government orchestrated and helped carry out the violent overthrow of a democratic Guatemala government. Since that time, through to the late 90s, Guatemala was ruled by an oligarchical military regime. During this time, the Guatemalan regime was funded, trained, armed and otherwise supported by the US. The worst years of State repression occurred in the late 70s, and into the 1980s.

During these worst years of State-sponsored repression -- referred to as *la violencia* [the violence] -- carried out against a mainly Mayan civilian population, the executive committees of the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) decided to fund the construction of the Chixoy hydroelectric dam in the municipality of Rabinal, Department of Baja Verapaz, Guatemala.

The projected flood basin of the Chixoy Dam was inhabited by Mayan Achi communities that had lived there for hundreds of years. The village of Rio Negro was opposed to the construction of the dam. In large part as a result of their opposition to the project, and being forced to resettle elsewhere, more than 440 community members were assassinated or killed in a series of massacres.

The filling of the dam basin began in January 1983, shortly after the final massacre in September 1982. After the massacres and filling of the Chixoy dam basin, both the World Bank and the IDB gave further loans to the military regime of Guatemala to complete the

project. In total, the WB and IDB loaned the regimes more than \$300,000,000 for the project.

Genocide

In February 1999, the United Nations sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification ("Truth Commission") released a report -- *Memoria del Silencio* -- which states that approximately 200,000 Guatemalans were killed in Guatemala between 1960 and 1996. Of the victims, 94% were killed by Guatemalan state forces, 3% by undetermined parties and 3% by the URNG revolutionary movement.

Memoria del Silencio concluded that in certain Mayan-dominated regions of the country, Guatemalan security forces planned and carried out genocide. Rabinal -- where the Chixoy dam was built -- was one such region where genocide was planned and carried out, as defined by the UN Convention on Genocide.

The Truth Commission concluded that the four massacres, the arbitrary executions of other members of the community before and after the massacres, and the harsh living conditions (due to flight from the massacres and the forced resettlement) that resulted in the deaths of numerous massacres survivors, together demonstrate the intent of the Army to destroy Rio Negro.

Faulty Project

Financially and technically the dam was a failure. Originally, the project's construction was estimated to cost \$270 million dollars. Currently the final cost is estimated by some to be over \$1 billion. There are on-going energy production problems. Sedimentation is building in the river basin. Some estimate that the "life of the dam" may end within 20 years, considerably shorter than initial predictions. In 1991, 45% of Guatemala's foreign debt was derived from the Chixoy dam project and in 1995, 51% of the national electric company's revenues were used to service the foreign debt.

Little Compensation; No Reparations

In the 70s, leading up to construction, there was never an honest and open process of consultation and negotiation. The people of Rio Negro were told they would have to resettle. This was a classic "development" project imposed from the top down. When they opposed this imposition, the repression began.

And yet, even with the imposed conditions of resettlement, the massacre survivors from Rio Negro have never received even close to adequate compensation for all that was taken from them (land, homes, river, personal property, orchards, crops, sacred sites, burial grounds, etc), much less reparations for the violence perpetrated against them. For close to twenty years, most surviving victims from Rio Negro have lived in conditions of poverty, repression and psychological trauma.

Struggle for Justice

It wasn't until 1993 that levels of repression in Guatemala decreased to such a point that brave individuals could begin to publicly denounce the crimes and atrocities of the past and begin to seek justice and redress for the loss of life and property.

In Rabinal, Rio Negro survivors formed their own self-help human rights organization to exhume the mass grave that contained the remains of 177 women and children massacred on March 13, 1982. Since that time, a local human rights group, now

called ADIVIMA, has grown and (receiving funds and other support from Rights Action) is supporting exhumations and human rights work throughout Rabinal.

In the context of these first exhumations, the Rio Negro survivors – most living in the military controlled community of Pacux (outside the town of Rabinal) – formed their own committee to denounce what happened to them before, during and after the construction of the Chixoy dam, and to seek reparations from the Guatemalan government, the WB and the IDB.

In 1996, the US-based organization Witness for Peace published “A People Dammed” that drew international attention to the repression that the people of Rio Negro suffered in the context of the Chixoy dam.

Struggle for Compensation and Reparations

Since 1996, while there has been increasing attention on the situation of the Rio Negro survivors, only a few small steps have been taken to provide the survivors with some of the compensation they should have received 20 years ago; nothing has been done to provide them with reparations.

DEMANDS

In this context, Rights Action is united with the people of Rio Negro to support them in their efforts to get full and proper compensation and just reparations, both from their own government and from the two banks. We set out here some of the general demands:

The WB and the IDB must fully compensate and provide reparations to the communities affected by the construction of the Chixoy Dam. This must be based on close consultation with the affected population and should include:

- 1) compensation for land and personal and community property lost or stolen;
- 2) reparations for loss of life and suffering related to the repression;
- 3) reparations for 17 years of lost income due to lack of access to land and personal and communal property;
- 4) reparations for lost family support due to murdered heads of household;
- 5) reparations for psychological damages;
- 6) reparations for loss of burial grounds and religious and cultural heritage.

The WB and IDB should appoint an independent commission specifically to investigate and publicly report on WB and IDB role and responsibility in the Chixoy experience. This commission must look especially at:

- 1) the lack of prior consultation and negotiation;
- 2) faulty project design, evaluation and monitoring;
- 3) corruption in the use of funds by Guatemalan military and other officials;
- 4) what WB and IDB officials knew about the repression, and when;
- 5) etc.

The WB and IDB should release all documents related to the Chixoy project. These documents should include internal memos project supervision reports and project evaluations and reports.

The WB and IDB should cancel, or reimburse in terms of reparations grants and projects, all debt related to the Chixoy project.

The WB, IDB and the international community should ask the Guatemalan government to place programs of reparations as the utmost priority in the peace process, closely monitor and fund Guatemala in the implementation of these programs.

Given the Truth Commission's finding that the United States government played a key role in supporting the Guatemalan military during the war, the US has a special responsibility with respect to reparations and rebuilding. Reparations should be implemented as outlined in the Program of National Reparation proposed by the Multi institutional Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation. Peace funds have been disproportionately used for national infrastructure projects and even military equipment.

Donor countries that loaned funds to the Guatemala government for the Chixoy dam, or for work related to its construction, and Trans-National Companies involved in the Chixoy project, should be held accountable for their actions or inaction as well.

This is the case of the Italian Government, that gave a loan of 14.3 billion, in 1992, and a grant of 12.9 billion liras in 1991. Moreover, the Italian Company Cogefar-Impresit (now Impregilo) helped in the construction of the dam, both during and after the massacres.

Within the Paris Club of creditors, the Italian government should cancel the Guatemala debt, providing reparations -- in form of a grant -- to the affected communities.

The Italian government should also commission an independent inquiry on the use, by the Guatemalan regime of the time, of "cooperation" funds, and on the responsibility of the Italian company involved in the construction.

Thank-you for distributing and re-publishing this information. As the campaign proceeds, we will keep you informed. If need be, we will distribute urgent action requests. We also look forward to receiving your questions, comments and suggestions.

Rights Action

416-654-2074, info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org