

June 15, 2000
Communique #2

“Dominga and Denese, and the story of the village of Rio Negro”

Dear friends:

On May 11, 2000, Rights Action circulated an article [also available in spanish] and a press release concerning the story of Denese Becker –from Algona, Iowa-- who, after 18 years, was going home to Rio Negro, a small, isolated Mayan village in the department of Baja Verapaz, Guatemala. [Please contact us if you want copies of the original article and release].

When she was a 9-year old girl, Denese -- then named Dominga Sic Ruiz -- was “lucky” to survive the “Rio Negro massacre”. On March 13, 1982 the Guatemalan Army and neighboring civil defense patrollers brutally massacred 177 women, elderly and children, including her parents and other members of her extended family. In 1982, four separate massacres (killing over 440 people) were committed against the people of Rio Negro, in large part due to their opposition to being forcibly displaced by the construction of the “Chixoy Dam”, funded [\$290,000,000] by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

We are pleased to announce that Denese has just completed a successful two-week trip to her home country and community. Yesterday, June 13th, she held a press conference in Guatemala City. Below, you will find:

- Press Conference: Statement of Denese Becker (Dominga Sic Ruiz) [also available in spanish].
- AFP article: “Massacre survivor accuses World Bank and IDB of negligence.”
- EFE articulo: “Guatemala: Superviviente de matanza exige resarcimiento para las victimas.”

Please copy, publish and re-distribute this information.

For interviews and information

If you would like more information about the story of “Denese and Dominga”, and of how the repression of the US-backed Guatemalan military regime intersected and overlapped with the construction of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank fund “Chixoy Dam”, contact: Rights Action (formerly Guatemala Partners), 1830 Connecticut Av, NW, Washington DC 20009, USA. T: 202-783-1123. F: 202-483-6730. E: info@rightsaction.org

Financial support

If you can provide financial support, or have ideas as to how to raise funds for the re-building of Rio Negro (Denese’s home community), or for projects to benefit the survivors of the Rio Negro / Chixoy Dam massacres [please see Denese’s Press Statement], contact Rights Action.

Press Conference: Statement of Denese Becker (Dominga Sic Ruiz)

My name is Denese Becker. I am an American citizen visiting my family in Guatemala. On October 8th, 1972, I was born in the village of Rio Negro, county of Rabinal, in the province of Baja Verapaz. My mother, Magdalena Lajuj Ruiz, and my father, Rosendo Sic, named me Dominga Sic Ruiz.

In 1982, Guatemalan army soldiers and Civil Patrollers from the neighboring village of Xococ assassinated my parents. On February 13, my father, along with 72 other men from Rio Negro, was assassinated and buried in a clandestine grave in the village of Xococ. One-month later, on the 13th of March, Guatemalan army soldiers and Civil Patrollers from Xococ entered my village. My mother, along with 176 women and children, died that day. I survived the massacre by escaping into the woods where I hid with other survivors. My infant sister died in the mountains. I was 9 ½ years old.

After many months of trying to survive in the woods, I was smuggled down the mountain and placed in the care of a nun in the town of Rabinal. From there, I was taken to an orphanage in Guatemala City. One year later, an American family adopted me. Today I live in Iowa with my husband Blane and our two sons.

My first years in the United States were very difficult; I had been torn away from everything that was familiar to me. Gradually, I adjusted to my new life, but always secretly longed to return to Guatemala, even though I did not know what I would find, or if any of my relatives had survived. Meanwhile, here in Guatemala, my surviving family members had been told various stories about where I was. They believed that I was in Costa Rica.

Last year, with the support of my North American family, I planned my trip to Guatemala. Just a few weeks before coming, I discovered that I do have relatives here and that they were very anxious to see me. When I arrived in Rabinal, I was met by a large group of people, including my aunts, uncles and many cousins. We spent last week getting to know one another and learning about each other's lives since the violence.

I have been asked what I had hoped to accomplish with this visit. I came to Guatemala because: I am looking for family; I want to learn about my past; I am seeking peace in my heart; and I'm looking for my heritage for the sake of my children.

During this trip I have found that my family and the rest of the survivors of the Rio Negro community face many serious problems. Many wrongs have been committed against us as a people and we continue to suffer the consequences of those actions.

What I remember about Rio Negro--a fertile river valley, plenty of food, a normal family life--no longer exists. I have seen the terrible conditions in which my relatives live today and this has motivated me to publicly state the following:

- I want to help in the struggle to get fair compensation for the losses suffered during the violence, especially our land.
- I want to help my family get out of the extreme poverty in which they live.
- I want to help them with their struggle for justice.

But these goals can not be achieved without financial and legal help. I know that there are institutions that could and should fulfill legal and moral obligations towards my community.

FIRST: I am not an expert on international banking politics. However, it has been well documented that the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank funded the Chixoy Dam Project, which destroyed my village. Despite the fact that military violence was used to extinguish local resistance to the loss of our lands, these international institutions continued financing the project.

Last February, INDE, the government-owned electric company responsible for the Chixoy dam project, declared itself legally immune to any further reparation negotiations with the community. Two decades after being forcibly removed from our lands, the Rio Negro community has still not received fair compensation for losses.

Today, I am publicly imploring the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to take responsibility for their negligence--to fund the projects that my community needs to escape the extreme poverty in which they live. I am asking them to help my people reconstruct their lives—lives that were destroyed by the Chixoy Dam project and state violence.

SECOND: As part of the Peace Accords, the Guatemalan Government has promised to conduct a nation-wide war reparation project. The beneficiaries of this project are to be the victims of human rights violations committed during the armed conflict. Last month, the Association for the Integral Development of the Victims of the Violence in the Verapaces (ADIVIMA) submitted a report to SEPAZ on the impact of state violence on Maya Achi communities in Rabinal. I urge the Guatemalan government to fulfill their commitment to compensate the victims of human rights violations.

THIRD: I request the closure of the military base that is located beside the community of Pacux and which continues to intimidate survivors of the violence and is in violation of the Peace Accords.

FOURTH: Due to evidence presented during the Rio Negro trial, the sentencing tribunal determined that nine other ex-Patrollers from Xococ, and an official of the Guatemalan army should be investigated in connection with the massacre. I would like to urge the Ministerio Publico to act on this court order.

I also believe that justice should be done for those who planned and ordered the killings of my family and for this I support my community in their efforts to prosecute the military high command.

The remains of my father and the other men that were massacred with him on February 13th, 1982 still lie in a clandestine grave in Xococ. It is my understanding that this grave has been illegally tampered with on several occasions. It is also my understanding that one such incident led to the 1994 arrest of the ex-Civil Patrollers from Xococ. These men were

later tried and convicted for a different crime--the March 13th massacre of the women and children of Rio Negro.

I want to know why the Ministerio Publico did not move immediately to have the tampered-with grave exhumed. Why has this clandestine grave been left unprotected from those who want to destroy evidence of crimes?

I urge the Ministerio Publico to do everything possible to expedite the exhumation of the clandestine grave located in Xococ in which lie the victims of the February 12, 1982 massacre. Like other survivors, I would like to bury my father with dignity.

Thank you. Denese Becker

Newspaper Article -- June 13, 2000

“Massacre survivor accuses World Bank and IDB of negligence”

GUATEMALA CITY, June 13 (AFP) - Indigenous Guatemalan Denese Becker accused the World Bank and Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) of negligence in funding the construction of a dam project that led to the massacre of his [should be “her”] biological parents. The World Bank and IDB financed the Chixoy hydroelectric dam in a move which led to the destruction of his [“her”] village in the Rio Negro community, where the army and paramilitaries carried out two massacres in 1982, killing 249 people, Becker said.

Becker, 28, whose former name was Dominga Sic, survived the massacres and was taken to an orphanage in the capital, before being adopted by a US couple who moved him [“her”] to Iowa. The military used violence to annihilate the local resistance to the dam, ending in the loss of indigenous land, he [“she”] told journalists during a press conference. However, the two institutions continued to finance the project, according to Becker, who has forgotten his [“her”] native language Achi, and now only speaks English.

Becker is demanding that the World Bank and IDB provide funds to alleviate the extreme poverty endured by surviving members of the community, to help them reconstruct their lives. A Guatemalan court sentenced three former paramilitaries Carlos Chen, 60, Pedro Gonzalez, 45, and Fermin Lajuj, 56, to 50 years in prison for the two massacres, having commuted the death sentence they received initially.

Articulo de prensa -- June 13, 2000

Guatemala: superviviente de matanza exige resarcimiento para las victimas

Guatemala, 13 jun (EFE).- Denese Becker, una ciudadana de Estados Unidos que nació hace 28 años en una aldea de Guatemala destruida durante la guerra civil, demandó hoy al Gobierno de este país centroamericano a resarcir a las víctimas de las atrocidades. Becker, cuyo nombre era Dominga Sic, es una superviviente de la matanza en 1982 de Río Negro, un poblado de la etnia maya-achí, situado a 180 kilómetros al norte de la capital, en el municipio de Rabinal, departamento de Alta Verapaz.

"Vine a Guatemala porque estoy buscando a mi familia; quiero entender mi pasado; estoy buscando paz en mi corazón y estoy buscando mi herencia histórica para compartirla con mis hijos", dijo hoy en una conferencia de prensa.

Becker recordó que el Ejército y las Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC) asesinaron a su madre, junto a otras 176 mujeres y niños, en Río Negro, y a su padre, y a otros 76 hombres, en la vecina Xococ. Las dos aldeas, de las aproximadamente 440 exterminadas, fueron castigadas por las operaciones del Ejército contra las guerrillas, dentro de la estrategia de "tierra arrasada".

Esta es la primera vez que Denese Becker visita su país de origen desde que lo abandonó en los años 80, y la semana pasada viajó a Rabinal para reencontrarse con sus familiares.

Al término de su visita, Becker se ha mostrado decidida a contribuir para que la justicia caiga sobre los responsables de las violaciones de los derechos humanos cometidas en su pueblo. Al respecto, recordó que la construcción de la mayor represa hidroeléctrica del país, financiada por el Banco Mundial (BM) y el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID), provocó la destrucción de Río Negro. Por ello, exigió a las dos entidades bancarias responsabilizarse de su "negligencia" y que financien proyectos que permitan a su comunidad salir de la pobreza extrema.

Al Gobierno del presidente del país, Alfonso Portillo, le demanda cumplir su obligación de implantar un programa de "resarcimiento justo", según el mandato de los acuerdos de paz, firmados en diciembre de 1996.

Un tribunal conmutó en febrero pasado la pena de muerte por 50 años de cárcel a tres ex integrantes de las PAC, grupo paramilitar para combatir a la guerrilla, por las matanzas de Río Negro y Xococ. Se trata de Fermín Lajuj, de 56 años; Carlos Chen, de 52; y Pedro González, de 45, encontrados culpables en todas las instancias de dos de los asesinatos perpetrados.

También, pidió al Ministerio Público que cumpla con la orden judicial de procesar a nueve antiguos integrantes de las PAC y a un oficial del Ejército guatemalteco. EFE

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