

August 2, 2000
Communique #2

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CHIXOY DAM REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN:
to Get Just Compensation and Reparations
from the World Bank & the Inter-American Development Bank
for Survivors of the Rio Negro Community
Destroyed by Construction of the Chixoy Dam in Guatemala

Dear friends,

Rights Action is involved with a campaign to have the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) provide full and proper compensation and reparations to the survivors of the Rio Negro community (Baja Verapaz, Guatemala).

The surviving townspeople of Rio Negro were forcibly and mercilessly displaced from their home community to make way for the construction of the Chixoy Dam project, 1975-1985, funded by the WB and the IDB. More than 440 Rio Negro townspeople were massacred. Most survivors live in conditions of poverty and psychological trauma today. In May 2000, we distributed Communique #1 [available at: www.rightsaction.org] that provides background information for this Campaign.

Below, you will find transcribed a conversation between James Wolfensohn (president of the World Bank), Stanley Fischer (acting managing director of the International Monetary Fund) and Ben Ladner, president of American University. This conversation was distributed by the Independent Media Center of Philadelphia. (See their explanation below as to how they got hold of a tape of this conversation and why they transcribed and distributed it.) It came to Rights Action via NISGUA, the Network in Solidarity with Guatemala, t: 202-518-7638, f: 202-223-8221, e: nisgua@igc.org.

We include excerpts of that conversation, as they pertain to the Chixoy Dam Project and the Reparations Campaign we are involved with. At the end, we provide comments pertaining to their remarks.

For more information about this campaign, and our work, contact our offices.

Thank-you.

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FROM THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER OF PHILADELPHIA, Wednesday July 19,
@07:47PM

Conversation between Heads of IMF, World Bank and American University, by
Anonymous

On April 13, 2000, just before the April 16th/17th demonstrations in Washington D.C., a day-long conference was held at American University (in DC) on various subjects surrounding the 'globalization' debates. Activist scholars like Dr. Walden Bello and officials from the World Bank and IMF were among the speakers that presented and took questions from the audience.

During the break for lunch, a select mix of NGO members, professors, and others (including business leaders?), were transported to a luncheon at a nearby hotel to hear James Wolfensohn (president of the World Bank) and Stanley Fischer (acting managing director of the International Monetary Fund) speak and field questions from the audience.

The two were unaware that the microphones on their table were activated during their lunch. As is frequently done, the live feed from these mics was provided to all the media covering the event (this allows the operators of recording equipment to test their connections, set levels, etc.)

The following is a transcript of the casual conversation that they had, believing (we can only assume) that it was private. Included in their conversation is Ben Ladner, president of American University, who hosted the event. Some points need to be made.

It should not be assumed that anything said in the transcript represents a casual conversation that the three might have had in true privacy. Also, one can only speculate as to how any of the three might have acted or spoken differently in the presence of any of the others. That is, they could be altering their words, opinions, and so on, for various political, social, or other reasons.

The decision to make this material public took into account their right to privacy. It was decided that the general urgency of the subject matter (i.e. 'globalization'), given their positions, outweighs the ethical transgression. President Ladner's introduction for the speakers is also included.

In the transcript, the following abbreviations and symbols are used:

F: Stanley Fischer

W: James Wolfensohn

AU: Ben Ladner (president of American University)

Words enclosed in /forward slashes/ were not totally clear; the best guess is given.

/?/ means that the word or words were unintelligible (typically because the signal was too weak.) A /?/ is never more than a small phrase. Thus, a sentence like I feel lucky to be here /?/ means that "I feel lucky to be here" was clearly stated and was followed by an unintelligible phrase. It does not mean that the printed words themselves were in question.

Thus, I feel lucky to be /here/ /?/ means that "I feel lucky to be" was clear, "here" is a reasonable guess for the next word, and an unintelligible phrase follows.

Other combinations should be clear by context.

Fischer's speech (with some editing and without questions from the floor) is at:

<http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2000/041300.HTM>

Wolfensohn's speech may be available somewhere.

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THE TRANSCRIPT: -----

(For a copy of the whole conversation, as transcribed by the Independent Media Center of Philadelphia, please go to NISGUA's website: <http://www.nisgua.org/AU.html>)

F: How's it going so far Jim?

W: I think it's OK. I think the press conference yesterday went quite well.

F: I saw you on the evening news.

W: Was that all right?

F: Yeah. You conveyed exactly the sense that... that I think our people have as well.

W: Which is?

F: You know, that it's difficult being accused of all these things.

W: Yeah, I said that.

F: Yeah, no, I... that's what I /saw there on the program/. I am trying still to figure out how to deal with the Ann Pettifors of the world that come in and give you a long lecture which is 'You guys are arrogant, you're unfeeling, you're unlistening' and then 'we care about

the poor.' And it's a psychological device, and there must be some way of switching the debate and I was trying to figure out afterwards; I thought one way next time is to say 'let's just agree: you're morally superior to us, [Someone: Hmm.] and now let's get on with the discussion.'

[. . .]

F: It's actually interesting. What is... /in that/ implicitly a lot of people in the press conferences are asking 'why now?' I don't have a good answer, do you?

W: I think it's post-Seattle. I think this a clear follow-on to the Seattle victory.

AU: Well why did Seattle bubble up so quickly and dramatically?

W: I think that is a fear of globalization, it's a fear of the unknown. There was a lot of... that did get some labor people as well, [AU: Right] there was a mixture there of trade issues...

AU: Right, right.

W: And other issues [garbled, interruption]

[. . .]

F: Yeah, but it's interesting that it should happen now at a time of real prosperity, and uh...

AU: At a time in which your institutions are doing more than ever before to be responsive to some of their concerns.

W: Right.

AU: That's what so odd.

[pause, eating]

[. . .]

AU: [sneeze] Pardon. Do you regard one of your institutions being more susceptible than the other to /?/

F: I suspect we each feel more susceptible than the other, but [AU: Ha ha ha] I'm not sure. They go off to Jim for a variety of things that /aren't like/, they don't have a chance to go off for us for, but I suspect that the underlying level of dislike may be /higher/ for the Fund than the Bank. Am I right? I'm not [AU: /Oh, that's inter.../] sure what you think, Jim.

W: I think probably that's right.

AU: Really?

W: /?/

F: They can get Jim on things like... they're after them on pipeline projects on [AU?: right] totally unreasonable...

W: After me on Tibet. They're, they get [AU?: Oh, yeah.] after us on, [F: More on specifics.] on dams, and specifics.

AU: Do they move to the higher level of the, the concept of what you're trying to accomplish [Both: No, no, no.] /there/ in a complicated way; they never get to that. Just black and white.

[COMMENTS RELATED TO THE CHIXOY DAM PROJECT IN GUATEMALA]

W: It's all ad hominem, it's all, ah, [Someone agreeing] they've brought in a [sic] indigenous person who was displaced in 1975, and whose [AU: /Yeah/] family has been

ruined, [AU: Right.] and they'll then blame us for the problems of Guatemala, [AU: Right.] and we'll say that there was a civil war for 32 years, and tens of thousands of people were killed down there, and this probably had nothing to do with the project, [AU: /Right/] but then someone will write a book, um... it makes it very difficult to answer [AU: Oh, yeah, right.] so you continue to try and deal with the specifics, with the Chixoy Indians, which we're doing, [AU: Right.] and then they agree, which they did, and we solved the whole thing, and now there's another Chixoy Indian coming /'out' or 'now'/ saying 'Well, we appreciated what you did, but now we want reparations and damages.' [AU: Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.] and so they've got a [AU: You've got to start all over again.] an Indian here who's very keen to do it. And these indigenous people, I'm not suggesting they didn't have problems, but they're also very smart. [AU: Sure.] So they come up and they think, 'it's a pretty good way to make a few bucks', ah. [AU: Right, right.]

F: And you can't say anything about the victims /you know, it's.../

AU: No, it's off limits.

AU?: /Yeah,/ completely.

F: /Well,/ a lot of the discussion is on the level of 'there is a problem and you are present therefore you are guilty.'

[. . .]

RIGHTS ACTION'S COMMENTS

The reference to the “Chixoy Indians” is incorrect. They are Maya Achi people.

The person who came to the US and Canada in March-April, 2000 was Carlos Chen Osorio, a survivor of the four Rio Negro massacres. His pregnant wife and two infant children were amongst the 177 women and children massacred in the 2nd Rio Negro massacre, on March 13, 1982.

When James Wolfensohn (president of the World Bank) comments “and they'll then blame us for the problems of Guatemala”, he is distorting the argument that Rights Action, and others, are making about the role of the WB (and the IDB) with respect to the Rio Negro / Chixoy Dam massacres. The role and responsibility of the Banks is direct and it is contributory. By choosing to provide close to \$300,000,000 to a military regime that was carrying out widespread repression across the country [including genocide in Mayan-dominated regions], the Banks became partially responsible for the actions of that military, particularly as pertains to the particular project they were funding: the Chixoy Dam Project.

James Wolfensohn (president of the World Bank) continues: “... and we'll say that there was a civil war for 32 years, and tens of thousands of people were killed down there, and this probably had nothing to do with the project, ...”

Firstly, one is obviously bothered by how casual the President of the WB can admit that the WB knew it was dealing with a military government in a country where tens of thousands of people were being killed. The United Nations Truth Commission confirmed that the total number of people –mainly Mayan—killed was over 200,000. Most of these deaths occurred between 1978-1983 – the same years of the Chixoy Dam project.

However, more importantly, Wolfensohn's point is clearly a major point in dispute. The WB is attempting to argue that their massive support for the Chixoy Dam Project (being carried out by a military regime) had nothing to do with the repression surrounding the Chixoy Dam Project.

Without going into detail here, it is worth reminding the WB of the investigation done by the United Nations Truth Commission for Guatemala (Comision para el Esclarecimiento Historico). The Commission featured the March 13, 1982 "Rio Negro" massacre as one of its unfortunately exemplary cases. The Commission drew a direct link between the repression suffered by those who opposed displacement (Rio Negro was the only community which consistently opposed being forcibly displaced) and the construction of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Project. A Guatemalan official, legal advisor to the Chixoy Dam Project, was interviewed by the Truth Commission concerning the Chixoy Dam. He said: "[I]n order to get them out, they had to use either force or persuasion: negotiate with those who wished to negotiate, and use force with those who did not." The Truth Commission report concludes that Rio Negro's pacific resistance to the Chixoy Dam project was resolved through violent repression.

James Wolfensohn (president of the World Bank) continues: "... and then they agree, which they did, and we solved the whole thing, and now there's another Chixoy Indian coming /'out' or 'now'/ saying 'Well, we appreciated what you did, but now we want reparations and damages.'"

This is a terrible comment. Wolfensohn suggests, firstly, that a manipulation is taking place, with different local representatives coming at different times. This is not the case.

Secondly, Wolfensohn claims that the "[WB] solved the whole thing." Categorically, Rights Action rejects this unfounded statement. While the WB has taken a few initial steps (since the 1996 release of the Witness for Peace publication "A People Dammed") to rectify the terrible situation in which the surviving victims are living, the surviving victims of the four Rio Negro / Chixoy Dam massacres are not even close to living in conditions comparable to how and where they lived before they were forced to leave their home community of Rio Negro.

And it is only obvious that the surviving community members want full and just compensation and reparations. Had Wolfensohn himself been a survivor of the massacres and forced displacement, he would want and demand nothing less for himself and his surviving family members.

James Wolfensohn (president of the World Bank) continues: "... And these indigenous people, I'm not suggesting they didn't have problems, but they're also very smart. [AU: Sure.] So they come up and they think, 'it's a pretty good way to make a few bucks', ah."

This crass comment speaks for itself. We can only but invite Wolfensohn, and any other WB official, to come to Rabinal, to speak with and listen to the survivors of the Rio Negro massacres.

We invite WB officials to open your hearts and hear their story of massacre, torture, flight and survival, and then ask yourselves again if the survivors are simply interested in "[making] a few bucks."

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