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Communique #2

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CHIXOY DAM / RIO NEGRO MASSACRES REPARATIONS CAMPAIGN:
to get full compensation and just reparations
from the World Bank & the Inter-American Development Bank
for indigenous (Mayan-Achi) survivors of the Rio Negro community
destroyed by construction of the Chixoy Dam in Guatemala

Communique #2 sets out background information to this Reparations Campaign.
Communique #3 [forthcoming] will provide a summary of sections of the United Nation's "Truth Commission" report, as related to the Rio Negro massacres and the Chixoy Dam.

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*** Please contact our office if you would like to financially support this work and/or get involved yourself

Dear friends,

As lead up to the forth-coming Annual Meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Prague (Czech Republic), Rights Action is releasing a series of articles and other information concerning the Chixoy Dam Project and Rio Negro massacres of 1982. RA staff-person Annie Bird is in Prague, addressing this issue in educational and advocacy forums. She is available for interviews and participation in public events. [anniebird@hotmail.com]

SUMMARY 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 regime also maintained strong relations with all "first" world governments, and a host of international financial and commercial institutions. 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 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 peaceful opposition to the project, and being obliged 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 WB and the IDB gave further loans to the military regimes of Guatemala to complete the project. In total, the WB and IDB loaned the regimes more than \$290,000,000.

GENOCIDE

In February 1999, the United Nations sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification ("Truth Commission") released a report -- *Memoria del Silencio* -- concluding that 200,000 (mostly Mayan) Guatemalans were killed in Guatemala's repression and internal conflict. 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.

FAULTY PROJECT

Financially and technically the dam was a failure. Originally, the project's construction was estimated to cost \$270,000,000. Currently the final cost is estimated to be \$1.2 billion, although some estimates range as high as \$2.5 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 -- now called ADIVIMA -- to exhume the mass grave that contained the remains of 177 women and children massacred on March 13, 1982. Since that time, ADIVIMA has grown and 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 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. [Witness for Peace, T: 202-588-1471, E: witness@w4peace.org]

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

The WB and IDB should fund and appoint a truly independent commission specifically to investigate and publicly report on WB and IDB role and responsibility in the Chixoy Dam project. 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) the decision-making process whereby the banks would enter into "development" project agreements with a well-known and widely denounced repressive regime;
- 6) etc.

The WB and IDB should release all documents related to the Chixoy Dam 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 Dam 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.

Donor countries that loaned funds to the Guatemala government for the Chixoy Dam, or for work related to its construction, and Transnational Companies involved in the Chixoy Dam 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, re-publishing and otherwise using this information. We look forward to receiving your questions, comments, criticisms and suggestions.

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ADVOCACY PROJECT's "On the Record" series.

For more information about the Rio Negro massacres and efforts to get compensation and reparations from the World Bank and the IDB, contact the Advocacy Project, that earlier this year produced an "On the Record" series: "Guatemala's indigenous communities seek reparations for two decades of murder and impoverishment." Contact: teresa@advocacynet.org.

----- New series of On the Record will follow the campaign from Guatemala's highlands to the World Bank in Washington -----

Written from Guatemala and the United States, this series tells how the small indigenous community of Rio Negro, in the Guatemalan highlands, lost more than half its members in a series of massacres in 1982. Carlos Chen, one of the survivors, fled to the mountains. After returning to the town of Rabinal in 1992, Carlos and a small group of fellow survivors formed a community organization and began to work to bring the killers to justice.

With help from Rights Action, the community has succeeded in exhuming graves, erecting monuments to those who died, and bringing to trial three civil patrolmen who participated in the 1982 massacres. The three men were recently sentenced to fifty years in prison. Hopefully, this will lead to more trials and chip away at the wall of impunity which has impeded the prospects for peace and reconciliation in Rabinal.

In the meantime the survivors of Rio Negro suffer from extreme poverty. They blame this on the loss of their lands and homes to a large dam that was built across the river Chixoy near the original community in 1983. Last year, the UN-sponsored Truth Commission also put the massacres in the context of the dam and the refusal of the community to be relocated.

This series of On the Record was written from Guatemala by Peter Lippman, an associate of the Advocacy Project, who visited the region of Rabinal recently.
