

Rights Action – August 5, 2011
Guatemala – The “Dos Erres” Massacre Trial

FOUR “MATERIAL AUTHORS” OF THE ‘DOS ERRES’ MASSACRE FOUND GUILTY

29 years after the 1982 massacre of over 250 campesinos in the rural village of Dos Erres, Peten department, four of the soldiers ordered to carry out the atrocities were found guilty and sentenced to jail.

Over 250,000 Guatemalans – mainly indigenous Mayan civilians – were killed and disappeared by the US & western-backed military regimes of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s, as part of the “war on communism.”

It is notable that this trial was against the “material” authors of Guatemala’s genocide and campaign of massacres, not against the “intellectual” authors.

BELOW

- Link to a Democracy Now interview with Annie Bird, of Rights Action, and Ramon Cadena, of the International Commission of Jurists
- A MSNBC news article

Rights Action honors and thanks the work of FAMDEGUA (Family Members of the Disappeared in Guatemala) that, since the exhumation of the Dos Erres massacre site in 1995, has been at the forefront of effort to demand truth, memory and justice for this and other massacres and crimes against humanity.

We thank all people in Guatemala and internationally who continue to support work and struggle for truth, memory and justice.

NO POLITICS AND BUSINESS AS USUAL WITH WAR CRIMINALS

This trial does not signify the end of impunity in Guatemala. Even as this one trial advances (in a country where over 600 massacres were committed), the leading candidate for Presidential elections in September 2011 is General Otto Perez Molina, one of the “intellectual authors” of Guatemala’s genocide and massacre campaign against its own civilian population.

That is to say - Even as a small number of trials proceed against a few “material” authors of the crimes of the past, the “intellectual” authors not only continue to live free from justice today, protected by impunity, but also many of them are among the economic elites and occupy the highest political offices in the country.

WHAT TO DO: see below.

- Please re-post & re-publish this information
- To get on-off Rights Action’s listserv: www.rightsaction.org
- Follow Rights Action on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org>

MORE INFORMATION / QUESTIONS: info@rightsaction.org

FAMDEGUA: famdegua@guate.net

DEMOCRACY NOW Interview

GUATEMALAN SOLDIERS SENTENCED TO 6,060 YEARS IN PRISON FOR ROLE IN 1982 MASSACRE

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/4/guatemalan_soldiers_sentenced_to_6_060

On Tuesday, a national court in Guatemala handed down the first convictions for a notorious massacre. It was 1982 when Guatemalan soldiers attacked the village of Las Dos Erres and killed more than 200 people — many of them women, children and the elderly — who were assaulted and beaten before they were shot or bludgeoned to death and then thrown down a well.

Now a Guatemalan judge has sentenced four of the soldiers who carried out the Dos Erres attack to 6,060 years of prison each, 30 years per person they killed. The court also found the soldiers guilty of crimes against human rights, adding another 30 years to their sentences.

It is the latest step in a process to end impunity for those involved in the deaths or disappearances of more than 200,000 people in the 1980s and 1990s.

However, human rights groups allege General Otto Pérez Molina, now a leading presidential candidate in Guatemala, was directly involved in the systematic use of torture and acts of genocide in the 1980s and could block pending cases if he is elected.

We speak with Annie Bird, co-director of Rights Action, and with Ramón Cadena, the ad hoc judge who heard the Dos Erres massacre case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/4/guatemalan_soldiers_sentenced_to_6_060

SOLDIERS SENTENCED TO MORE THAN 6,000 YEARS IN GUATEMALA MASSACRE

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44005630/ns/world_news-americas/#.TjmlGM3em-s

GUATEMALA CITY — A Guatemalan court has sentenced four former soldiers to more than 6,000 years in prison each for the 1982 massacre of 201 men, women and children during the Central American country's civil war. Three former special forces soldiers received 6,060 years in prison each on Tuesday. The court also sentenced a former army second lieutenant to 6,066 years in prison for the same massacre in the village of Dos Erres in Guatemala's northern Peten region.

The length of the sentences is largely symbolic since under Guatemalan law the maximum time a convict can serve is 50 years. The sentences for Manuel Pop Sun, Reyes Collin Gualip and Daniel Martinez include thirty years for each death, plus thirty years for crimes against humanity. The three men are former members the Guatemalan military's elite Kaibil unit.

Former 2nd Lt. Carlos Antonio Carias received an extra six years for stealing the victims' belongings, the court said in a statement. Prosecutors say Carias was in charge of a military base near the community of Dos Erres and provided information to the army that led to the massacre.

Outside the court, survivors of the massacre cried when the sentences were announced and held red roses. They spelled the word "justice" on the ground with red petals.

"We waited many years for justice," said survivor Raul de Jesus Gomez. "I saw when they were killing people. They had us kneeling for five hours and would put their rifles in our mouths every time we asked them to stop killing the others."

A group of the relatives of the accused soldiers shouted that the court was biased. Carias called the sentence "unjust" and said, "I would risk my life again for that honorable institution that is the Army."

Court filings say 17 Kaibiles attacked the community of Dos Erres before dawn on Dec. 7, 1982, looking for missing weapons that guerrilla groups operating in the region had stolen from the soldiers days earlier. They accused the farmers of collaborating with the rebels.

While more than 40 soldiers guarded the perimeter of the community, the men raped and killed women and girls, and banished hundreds of people from the community, according to the filings.

The officers shot, strangled and bludgeoned the villagers to death with sledgehammers, Reuters reported.

Witnesses say villagers were tortured and robbed by the soldiers as part of a "scorched earth" effort to eliminate communities supporting insurgent groups at the height of Guatemala's 36-year civil war.

Dozens of bodies were exhumed from a well in the community in the 1990s and the remains from 171 victims were recovered in all. At least 67 children under the age of 12 were among the dead.

This is Guatemala's second massacre trial related to its 1960-1996 civil war, when more than 200,000 people, mostly Mayan Indians, were killed or went missing and entire villages were exterminated, according to the United Nations.

The first trial ended in a 2004 verdict against an officer and 13 soldiers, but the verdict was overturned on appeal.

This trial had been delayed since 2000 through dozens of court injunctions.

Another three Kaibiles from the same unit were detained in the United States. One, Pedro Pimentel Rios, 54, has been already been deported. Guatemala's Public Ministry will hold a separate hearing for Rios. A fourth one was detained in Canada. Guatemala has requested extradition.

The ruling center-left administration of President Alvaro Colom has been under pressure by human rights organizations to bring war criminals to justice in Guatemala, one of the poorest and most lawless countries in Latin America.

WHAT TO DO - TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

for indigenous and campesino organizations working for community-controlled development, environmental justice, human rights & justice in Guatemala & Honduras, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: <http://rightsaction.org/contributions.htm>
DONATIONS OF STOCK: info@rightsaction.org

SPEAKERS: Contact us to plan educational presentations in your community, school, place of worship, home (info@rightsaction.org)

EDUCATIONAL-ACTIVIST DELEGATIONS TO GUATEMALA & HONDURAS: Form your own group and/ or join one of our educational delegation-seminars to learn first hand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles (info@rightsaction.org)

CREATE YOUR OWN email and mail lists and re-distribute our information

RECOMMENDED DAILY NEWS: www.democracynow.org / www.upsidedownworld.org / www.dominionpaper.ca

RECOMMENDED BOOKS: Eduardo Galeano's "Open Veins of Latin America"; Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States"; James Loewen's "Lies My Teacher Told Me"; Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine"; Paolo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"; Dr Seuss's "Horton Hears A Who"

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Annie Bird, annie@rightsaction.org

Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org

Karen Spring, spring.kj@gmail.com