

Rights Action  
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## **U.S. Government Calls On World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank To Ensure Reparations Plan For Chixoy Dam Victims**

This is a hugely important step towards achieving reparations for surviving victims of the Chixoy Dam massacres and illegal, forced evictions in Guatemala. The U.S. government - that at the time was fully invested in the Chixoy Dam project and supporting the Guatemalan military regimes that carried out the Chixoy Dam massacres and evictions - is the largest investor in the WB and IDB, and has now, 32 years later, finally agreed that reparations must be paid.

From 1975-1985, the WB and IDB partnered with the repressive and genocidal regimes of General Lucas Garcia, 1978-1982, and General Rios Montt, 1982-1983, and invested close to \$1 billion in the Chixoy dam "development" project. Over 440 Mayan Achi villagers were massacred in the Rio Negro community. Thousands more Mayan campesinos were illegally and forcibly evicted from some 32 communities. The survivors have been suffering in poverty and abandonment ever since.

Since 1994, Rights Action has funded and supported a wide range of projects spear-headed by the surviving family and community members of the Chixoy Dam/ Rio Negro massacres. For close to 20 years, we – along with other groups – have supported their courageous struggle for justice for the Chixoy Dam/ Rio Negro massacres and the forced evictions of up to 32 Mayan communities and thousands of villagers.

- What To Do / How To Support ~ see below

### **Questions/ More information**

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## **Guatemala's Indigenous Communities Boosted By Landmark Reparations Bill**

US expected to instruct World Bank [and Inter-American Development Bank] to address atrocities suffered by residents during Chixoy dam construction

By [Mark Tran](#), [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), 17 January 2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jan/17/guatemala-chixoy-dam-reparations-bill>

President Barack Obama is poised to sign into law next week a landmark bill bringing closer the prospect of reparations for the indigenous Maya Achi community, more than 30 years after hundreds were massacred to clear the way for building the Chixoy dam in [Guatemala](#).

The 2014 consolidated appropriations bill, involving more than \$1tn, which funds discretionary government spending, instructs the US directors of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) – which co-financed construction of the dam – to "report ... on the steps being taken by such institutions to support implementation of a [2010 reparation plan](#) (pdf) for damages suffered by the communities when the dam was built".

For more than 20 years, survivors have called upon the Guatemalan government, the World Bank and the IADB to pay reparations for the atrocities in connection with the dam. Their efforts led to the 2010 reparation plan, which was signed by the government of Guatemala, affected communities and a representative of the Organisation of American States.

Two of the provisions for reparations include compensation for material and non-material damages and losses totaling \$154.5m for communities affected by the dam and implementation of a management plan for the Chixoy basin based on integrated watershed management. This includes reforestation with native plants, establishing an ecological flow adequate for the basin, and guarantees of minimum water quantity and quality.

The appropriations bill is the latest step in the long campaign to win reparations for events that continue to [haunt the affected communities](#).

The dam was built on the Chixoy river in the early 1980s and forcibly displaced more than 3,500 Maya Achi people. More than 6,000 families living in the area also lost their lands and livelihoods. When community members opposed relocation and sought better compensation, more than 400 people – including women and children – were massacred, tortured and kidnapped by government and paramilitary forces, as authorities lumped opposition to the dam with a long-running insurgency.

Activists have welcomed the legislation as a historic step. "A great and important precedent has been set," said Monti Aguirre, of US NGO [International Rivers](#). "Large dams have been forcibly displacing millions of people and affecting biodiversity for more than a hundred years. It seemed like people and nature could be disposed of. But, with this new precedent I feel hopeful that together we can begin to steer a new course for our rivers and the people who depend on them."

Analysts say the latest move marks a milestone not just because it brings reparations closer, but because it also has important development repercussions for Guatemala.

A US-based expert on the dam, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "Commercial and other interest rates for investments in Guatemala will become more expensive if this issue is not resolved, affecting the business community negatively or positively depending on the result. Foreign investors in wind power, hydropower, electric grids, ports and other sectors in Guatemala will think twice if this case is not resolved. If this doesn't happen soon, politics in Guatemala will take over during the next election cycle and make a resolution difficult."

The expert also said he was impressed by steps the banks are taking to push the Guatemalan government to implement the reparations plan, although those efforts have not yet borne fruit.

There are echoes of the Chixoy dam in current social conflicts pitting mining and hydroelectric companies against indigenous communities. In a particularly contentious case in the north-western department of Huehuetenango, the municipality of Barillas – consisting mainly of the indigenous Maya Q'anjob'al people – has [been protesting](#) against a dam project. The area has been in upheaval since 2010, when the government issued a licence to Hidro Santa Cruz, a subsidiary of the Spanish-owned company Hidralia Energy, to build the Cambalam hydroelectric dam.

Activists said the appropriations bill set down an important marker for development institutions when funding large infrastructure projects. "When people were tortured and massacred to make way for this project the [World] Bank was funding, it didn't even register on the World Bank's radar," Nick Dearden of the World Development Movement said. "The US administration worked hand in glove with the brutal regime in Guatemala at that time.

"The bill is also forward looking – which is vital because the World Bank has learned too little in the past 30 years, and continues to fund projects around the world which put corporate profit before people's rights."

Sarah-Jayne Clifton, director of the Jubilee debt campaign, said: "Communities in Guatemala have been demanding justice over the horrific atrocities linked to the Chixoy dam for decades.

"Hopefully the pressure from the US Congress will finally make the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank pay compensation to the thousands of people who were forcibly displaced or whose family members were murdered resisting the construction of the dam."

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### **What To Do?**

In the following days, Rights Action will publish more information focused on what needs to be done now. A lot of pressure needs to be brought on the governments of the United States, Canada, Europe, etc, to ensure they oblige the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank to ensure that the \$154,000,000 Reparations Plan is funded and implemented.

### **Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)**

To support the Chixoy Dam Reparations Campaign, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

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