

Rights Action
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**Canadian “Snowbird” Ethnocide Against Indigenous People in Honduras:
Major Canadian tourism investor Randy Jorgensen, the “Porn King” according to Macleans
magazine, leads the way**

- What to do / How to support: see below

**‘Little Canada’ Displacing Afro-Indigenous Communities In Honduras: Canadian
investor Randy Jorgensen blames concerns on ‘extremist factions’**

By Sandra Cuffe, <https://ricochet.media/en/243/little-canada-displacing-afro-indigenous-communities-in-honduras>

As Canadian investors gradually take over lands in Honduras' Trujillo Bay for tourism and real estate projects, Afro-Indigenous [Garifuna](#) communities along this stretch of Caribbean coastline are being displaced.

A new cruise ship port is now open for business in Trujillo, a town of just over 10,000 about 400 kilometres north of the Honduran capital. Rio Negro, a Garifuna community, was largely displaced under threat of forced expropriation to make way for the project.

Sixteen kilometres to the west, the Garifuna community of Guadalupe is now bordered by Alta Vista, one of Canadian investor Randy Jorgensen's several residential development projects marketed to Canadian 'snowbirds'.

It's 32 degrees out but it feels like 40 in the midday sun as local Garifuna activist Celso Guillén points things out along the short walk through Guadalupe and over to Alta Vista. A group of youth are busy separating plantain rhizomes into piles by size and other men and women are organizing the shipment of cacao seedlings for distribution. The problem is that community members don't have much land left to plant the crops. “We've lost almost 80 percent of our community's lands, and the majority of those lands are in Mister Randy's hands,” says Guillén.

Guadalupe's inalienable community title covers nearly 250 hectares, but the municipal government of Santa Fe has issued deeds within those lands and they have been registered by the country's Property Institute. The municipality “has issued fee simple land titles — overlapping titles that are basically fictitious and without validity because there's already a collective title,” says Guillén. “The title says that the lands are unalienable, and any act of that nature violates the spirit of the title.”

‘They don't have a purpose’: Jorgensen

Just after six in the morning, Jorgensen sips his coffee outside his home in Coroz Alta, a residential development a few kilometres west of Trujillo on an estate now billed as a private nature park. Beside the road leading down to his house, monkeys, coatmundis and scarlet macaws are on display in enclosures.

Cruise ship passengers come here on day trips organized by “Banana Coast Tours”, one of Jorgensen's companies linked to the new Banana Coast cruise ship terminal, another of his projects.

Jorgensen dismisses the Garifuna community land claims. It's the same story in Guadalupe as it is in Rio Negro and it's not really about the land, he says. "They have extremist factions in there that are extremely politically motivated and go out of their way to create whatever problems that they can for anything that doesn't actually put money into their own personal pockets."

Other Canadian developers have since followed, but Jorgensen remains the main player in the area.

He opened an "Adults Only Video" store in a small town in Saskatchewan in 1987, and the company quickly expanded to dozens of outlets across Canada. After more than a decade of winter visits to Trujillo, Jorgensen decided to make the move permanent, and later began working on plans for a cruise port facility and real estate projects in Trujillo Bay.

"Our goal is to create \$300 million of investment in this area to create \$100 million economic activity annually. So it's not a small thing," says Jorgensen. His company, "Life Vision Developments", is developing several projects in the area: Campa Vista, Coroz Alta, New Palm Beach and Alta Vista. "We have about 1,500 acres of residential development underway now. We sold 500 properties to Canadians. They're starting to call it Little Canada."

Jorgensen categorically denies that the Alta Vista project overlaps with the Guadalupe community title, but he also alleges the community didn't use the land for anything anyway. "It's not as though this land needs to be preserved for 'this purpose.' They don't have a purpose. They don't have a plan. They don't have something to do with it. The whole purpose of the exercise is 'how do I get money into my pocket?'"

'We used to go there to work': Guillén

Alta Vista, however, is one of the main areas that was used by community members to grow subsistence crops like yucca, plantains and beans. "I know this because we used to go there to work the land with our parents. That's where we worked. We would work in another place for a while and then there for a while," says Guillén.

Along with fishing, Garifuna communities traditionally practice the fallow system of farming, rotating between areas to allow the soil to recuperate for periods between crops. Both land and sea are vital to both the sustenance and culture of the Garifuna.

The ethnogenesis of the Garifuna began in the early 17th century on the island of Saint Vincent, where shipwrecked Africans trafficked as slaves for colonial plantations in the Caribbean — and later also escapees — mixed with local Arawak and Carib Indigenous people. The Garifuna were forcibly expelled by the British in 1797 and dropped off on an island off the coast of Honduras, from where they spread out and formed communities along the Caribbean coast of Central America from Belize to Nicaragua.

Both the Garifuna language, part of the Arawak family, and culture have diverse African and Indigenous Caribbean roots. In 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization declared the Garifuna language, dance and music to be among the 19 inaugural Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Today, though, many Garifuna communities in Honduras are facing yet another expulsion.

Leaving Guadalupe behind, the old yellow school bus rattles past the Garifuna community of San Antonio before passing Njoi Santa Fe, another real estate project under construction by Canadian developers. After the community of Santa Fe, it's a steady stream of Canadian-

owned tourism and real estate projects along the 11 kilometers back to Trujillo: New Palm Beach, the Banana Beach Resort, Njoi Trujillo, Coroz Alta and Campo del Mar, Campa Vista and the Tranquility Bay Beach Resort.

There has been some critical outside attention on tourism projects in Garifuna territory further west along the Caribbean coast. This stretch, however, has flown largely under the radar, according to Miriam Miranda, the General Coordinator of OFRANEH, a Garifuna federation at the forefront of the struggle to defend Garifuna rights, lands and territory in Honduras.

"No one really talks about all the investment that's happening in the Trujillo Bay, all the way out to the Guadalupe area even. They're taking over the whole corridor," said Miranda. The new Banana Coast cruise ship port has certainly been a hot topic of discussion in the area lately, but there too, the issue of land acquisition usually goes unmentioned.

"That case is the first experience we had where eminent domain legislation was used, facilitating Randy Jorgensen's takeover of Rio Negro," said Miranda.

Cruising the Canadian-owned Banana Coast

The atmosphere of anticipation was almost palpable in Trujillo on Oct. 15, 2014. The Norwegian Jewel, a 2,376-passenger Norwegian Cruise Line ship with more than 1,000 crew members, was about to arrive. The Jewel and other companies' cruise ships will be calling at Banana Coast all season, through April 2015. Banana Coast is owned and run by Grande Trujillo Autoridad, of which the driving force, primary owner and president is Randy Jorgensen.

There was little cause for celebration in Cristales and Rio Negro, two historic Garifuna communities on the coast at the western and eastern edges of Trujillo respectively. The Banana Coast cruise ship terminal and retail complex is located in Rio Negro.

"It was a community. That was part of their habitat. That's where they would leave their cayucos [dugout canoes], where they would go fish. Now they can't go to leave their cayucos on the beach. The entry of Rio Negro community members is strictly prohibited there because it's a private zone now," says Victor García, a member of the Cristales and Rio Negro community council.

When some Garifuna community members refused to give up their lands, the municipality of Trujillo declared the Banana Coast project in the public interest in December 2009. The decree was published in the Official Gazette in February 2010, allowing the state to exercise the right of eminent domain. Through threat of forced expropriation, the cruise ship port developers were able to acquire the remaining lands.

But the contested Banana Coast project still lays within one of two inalienable Cristales and Rio Negro collective land titles. The 1886 and 1901 titles cover nearly 100 square kilometers in various sectors in the region, including some of Jorgensen's real estate development.

Colluding with the state

Jorgensen's projects may benefit from the investment protection provisions in the new Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement, negotiated in the wake of a June 2009 coup d'état, but attracting tourists and snowbirds to the country with the highest per capita homicide rate in the world outside of a war zone is no easy task.

On Aug. 4, 2014, the Honduran government signed a \$133,334 contract with Burson-Marsteller, an international public relations firm, to build a "national image" and "country brand" to boost

foreign investment, exports, and tourism. That same day, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández launched a new national tourism website.

Tourism and real estate promoters in Trujillo maintain that the violence plaguing Honduras is largely concentrated in certain pockets elsewhere around the country and particularly in its two main cities, San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa.

In fact, the 2013 homicide rate in the municipality of Trujillo was 93.3 per 100,000 inhabitants, higher than the national rate and even that of the capital district. From Banana Coast, it is only about 10 kilometers to the edge of the heavily militarized Bajo Aguan region, where more than 100 people involved in farm worker movements and land occupations have been killed since the 2009 coup.

The area has also been identified by the government as one of 14 possible sites for Economic Development and Employment Zones, regions that would essentially function as semi-autonomous, privatized city-states. These zones “embrace trade liberalization beyond simple tax and infrastructure incentives: they enable the corporate entities, organizations and individuals who will fund and participate in the zones to structure the social organization itself. This process includes the content of laws, the tax structure, educational, labor and health care system, security forces and other basic elements typically managed by the state,” wrote the authors of a September 2014 National Lawyers Guild report.

Attention on specific Economic Development and Employment Zones projects is largely focused on southern Honduras, where feasibility studies, investment agreements and community resistance are all underway. However, documents obtained by Ricochet reveal that detailed maps, plans and studies have been drawn up for a special development zone encompassing the full territorial area of the municipalities of Trujillo and Santa Fe.

The principal author of the studies was Arquitectnic. The company's president, Honduran architect and planner Dino Rietti, was commissioned as the construction and project manager for the Banana Coast cruise ship port complex. Rietti has also advised the government on special development zones.

Turning to the law

Garifuna communities continue to defend their lands despite the difficulties. “The government's in collusion with everything that's going on here,” says Guillén, adding that a lawsuit might be one of the only options. However, neither Guillén nor García consider it likely that their respective communities will be able to address illegal community lands sales or obtain justice within the domestic legal system.

“We're going to have to launch both national and international lawsuits,” says García.

The cases of three other Garifuna communities, accompanied by OFRANEH, are currently before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Two of them involve tourism projects in Garifuna territory. At least one ruling is expected next year.

The 2009 Military Coup In Honduras: Repression, impunity and global business opportunities

The extremely high levels of repression and violence in Honduras are not a “Honduran problem” – they are also a U.S. and Canadian problem. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the ‘Murder Capital of the world’, the ‘Repression Capital of the Americas’. Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have legitimized a succession of illegitimate, repressive regimes.

North American companies and investors, and “development” banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) have increased business activities in African palm production, maquiladora sweatshops, privatized “model cities”, tourism and mining. The Honduran regime remains in power due, in large part, to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada and the “development” banks.

Across Honduras, community based organizations – struggling for fundamental reform to the Honduran State and society - need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

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