

U.S. & Canada help produce refugee flight from Honduras & Guatemala

By Grahame Russell, December 30, 2018

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/the-us-canada-are-helping-produce-refugee-flight-from-honduras-guatemala>

Three Guatemalan refugee children have recently died in U.S. custody.



Moving reports were published in the LA Times and NY Times about the death of 8-year-old Felipe Gomez Alonso on Christmas day:

- An 8-year-old Guatemalan child dies in U.S. custody on Christmas Eve after being treated for a cold, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-border-patrol-death-20181225-story.html>
- 8-Year-Old Migrant Child From Guatemala Dies in U.S. Custody, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/us/guatemalan-boy-dies-border-patrol.html>

Two more media reports that provide no coverage about how the U.S. and Canada (together with other 'international actors' such as the World Bank, mining and hydro-electric dam companies, tourism operators, banana, African palm and sugar cane producers, etc.) contribute directly to the underlying causes of why 10s of 1000s of Hondurans and Guatemalans are forced to flee into exile very year, dating back years, with no end in sight going forward.

Most media coverage concerning the refugees fleeing Honduras and Guatemala focuses on the plight of the refugees themselves, not the underlying causes in their home countries that forced them to flee, and certainly not on how the policies and actions of the U.S., Canada and other actors in the 'international community' are part of the problem.

It remains a huge challenge to human rights activists, advocates and so-called experts to begin to regularly expose and hold accountable governments and global companies, banks and investors in the "international community" when their policies and actions cause human rights violations, environmental degradation and repression in other countries, other jurisdictions.



(Fall 2018 caravan of people fleeing mainly Honduras and Guatemala. Photo: Guillermo Arias)

Desperate people have been fleeing corrupt, exploitative, violent regimes in Central America for generations; fleeing U.S.-backed military regimes for generations.

In 2009, Canada got in on the direct intervention action, together with the U.S., supporting a military coup in Honduras resulting in 9 years of extreme violence and suffering for a majority of Honduras.

Elephant in the room

By design and operation, Guatemala and Honduras are refugee producing countries, but what is rarely addressed is the role of the 'international community'.

For generations, other governments, investors and companies in the so-called 'international community' have maintained mutually beneficial political, military and economic relations with Honduras and Guatemala. While the U.S. is the main culprit, the governments of Canada and certain European Union countries have never wavered in their support.

The World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (investment banks controlled by a small number of wealthy countries), and many global companies and investors maintain profitable business relations with the corrupt, repressive elites of both countries, year in, year out.

One is often told by the media, politicians and assorted 'experts' that the international community is concerned about crime, violence, poverty and (fill-in-the-space) in Honduras, Guatemala, ... with absolutely

no discussion of how other governments and global economic actors are implicated in these endemic problems.

The power and wealth of the Honduran and Guatemalan economic elites, governments, military and police derive primarily from their relations with this “international community”, not from the democratic will of the people.



U.S. & Canadian leaders glad-handing and legitimizing undemocratic, corrupt, repressive leaders of Honduras and Guatemala, all of whom (Porfirio Lobo & Juan Orlando Hernandez, Honduras; Otto Perez Molina & Efraín Ríos Montt, Guatemala) have been/ are implicated in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and organized crime (including narco-trafficking), while leading regimes characterized by repression and violence, corruption and impunity - and pro-global investor and business policies.

Refugee producing global order

For 23 years, Rights Action has supported communities in Honduras and Guatemala and their human rights, environmental and territorial defense struggles; their truth and justice struggles.

Pretty much every one of these struggles has been or is in response to human rights violations, forced evictions, environmental harms, exploitation and repression carried out by the Honduran and Guatemalan political-economic-military elites in partnership with international banks, companies and investors that, themselves, are supported by their home governments, primarily in the U.S., Canada and E.U.

Here, we summarize some community struggles Rights Action supports, past and present, illustrating the roles of other governments and global economic actors in helping create and profit from the very conditions that force desperate people to flee.

Chixoy dam

For over 15 years, Rights Action supported victim-survivors of the 1982 Chixoy dam massacres that killed over 440 people from the Mayan Achi village of Rio Negro and forcibly evicted 32 communities. This repression was carried out by the U.S.-backed military regimes of generals Lucas Garcia and Ríos Montt in direct support of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank's Chixoy dam project.

No justice was done for the 'intellectual authors' of these atrocities. A partial reparations plan was achieved after a 20 year struggle. The World Bank and IDB profited from their investments of 100s of millions of dollars in this "development" project, arrogantly avoiding any political and legal accountability.



Mining

For over 13 years, Rights Action has supported communities suffering and resisting forced evictions, killings and repression, environmental and health harms, linked to Canadian and U.S. companies: Goldcorp Inc. in Guatemala and Honduras; Aura Minerals in Honduras; Hudbay Minerals (Skye Resources/ INCO) in Guatemala; Tahoe Resources in Guatemala; KCA/Radius Gold in Guatemala.



Investors in these mines include: U.S. and Canadian pension funds, shareholders, private investors, trusts, endowments, the World Bank, etc. Violent, corrupt, harmful mining is clearly good for business.

Except for the landmark Huidbay Minerals and Tahoe Resources lawsuits, working their ways slowly and spectacularly through Canadian courts, no justice or accountability has been done in Honduras, Guatemala, Canada or the U.S. for any mining-caused violence and killings, harms and evictions. The U.S. and Canadian governments overtly support the expansion of mining.

Tourism

Since before the U.S. and Canadian-backed military coup in Honduras, and spiraling since then, Canadian and U.S. tourism investors have used and benefited from corruption, violence and forced evictions to get control of lands of the indigenous Garifuna people, to then build condos and holiday enclaves for North American and European tourists.



Randy “porn king” Jorgensen, with post-military coup leader “Pepe” Lobo, whose son, brother and wife are all implicated in organized crime, including drug-trafficking.

Dams

Beyond the Chixoy dam massacres and debacle, Rights Action has supported other communities in Guatemala and Honduras suffering and resisting evictions and repression caused by internationally-financed dam projects. The most known struggle is that of the Lenca people in western Honduras suffering and resisting evictions, criminalizations and repression due to the Agua Zarca dam that resulted in the assassination of Berta Caceres and attempted assassination of Gustavo Castro.



Mother and found children of Berta Caceres

In a country of spectacularly entrenched corruption and impunity, the trial against the ‘material authors’ of her assassination and shooting of Gustavo Castro is painstakingly going forward. To date, no justice has been done for the ‘intellectual authors’, Honduran economic and political elites who planned and paid for the assassination team.

African palm

In the Aguan region of northern Honduras, and Polochic region of eastern Guatemala, Rights Action has provided emergency funding to family members of people killed, and to communities violently evicted by wealthy elites using military, police and hired gun violence to take their lands for the production of African palm. In recent years, the demand of African palm has spiked as a source of “green energy” biofuel. The World Bank has been a major investor/ profiteer.



Honduras military-backed regime

Since the U.S. and Canadian military coup of 2009, Rights Action has increased our work in Honduras, supporting our long-term partners COPINH and OFRANEH, and other community groups resisting the coup

and three sets of fraudulent, violent elections (2009, 2013, 2017), resisting nine years of systemic government killings, criminalizations, and jailings of political prisoners.



The illegitimate Honduran regime would never have lasted in power, but for the unwavering political, economic and military relations with certain governments (particularly the U.S. and Canada) and numerous economic actors in the ‘international community’.

Fundamental inter-connectedness and co-responsibility

The point is each of these situations (economic exploitation and harms; political repression; fraudulent elections; etc.) involves the direct participation of other governments and global economic actors.

Each of these situations contributes directly to why 10s of 1000s of Hondurans and Guatemalans are forced to flee, year after year.

In Honduras and Guatemala, no matter how hard people work, legally and peacefully, to restore fair elections and real democracy, and to have their human rights, territories and local environment respected, as long as their economic, political and military elites maintain beneficial relations with other governments and a host of global economic actors, these regimes will continue to use repression, corruption and impunity to keep in place exploitative, violent economic models ... that force 10s of 1000s of people to flee every year.

There’s the rub. There’s the fundamental inter-connectedness and co-responsibility. This is what Rights Action –and partner groups north and south– work to expose and change, one struggle at a time, all at the same time.

Rights Action’s work plan

In 2019, we will continue with the same fundamental elements of our work:

- funding community organizations and individuals spear-heading their own human rights, justice, environmental and territorial defense struggles;
- funding people suffering health harms due to repression and economic violence;
- supporting north-south education, activism and justice work, exposing and attempting to hold accountable the U.S. and Canadian governments and North American companies and investors that contribute to and benefit from endemic exploitation and poverty, repression, environmental destruction, corruption and impunity, in places like Honduras and Guatemala.

Thank-you for your trust and support. We chip away. I appreciate your questions and comments.

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