

Guatemala & El Salvador set to give impunity and 'get-out-of-jail-free' card to war criminals

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/guatemala-el-salvador-set-to-give-impunity-and-get-out-of-jail-free-card-to-men-convicted-of-war-crimes>

- **Below:** article by Sandra Cuffe, Al Jazeera

As the U.S. & Canada coddle the corrupt, repressive government in Guatemala, "democratic ally" in the illegal U.S.-Cdn led aggression against Venezuela, Guatemala's corrupt congress is close to passing an Amnesty law, and would then release from jail dozens of military and paramilitary men convicted of forced disappearance, rape, massacres and other war-time atrocities.

Going back to 1995, Rights Action has supported mainly Mayan community groups that suffered war crimes and atrocities, including genocide, and who have courageously worked for truth and justice since then.

What an extraordinarily vicious and harmful set-back this will be for the victims and their communities, let alone for the country as a whole.

Central Americans confront amnesty for war crimes: Opposition grows to legislative initiatives in Guatemala and El Salvador that would set war criminals free

by Sandra Cuffe, Al Jazeera news, March 6, 2019

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/central-americans-confront-amnesty-war-crimes-190306220652220.html>



The armed conflict in Guatemala left 200,000 dead and 45,000 disappeared [File: Sandra Cuffe/Al Jazeera]

Guatemala City - For decades, Raul de Jesus Gomez fought for justice for his brother Ramiro, killed in a 1982 massacre in northern Guatemala. Now, he is fighting to keep the perpetrators behind bars.

The year Gomez was born marked the beginning of the 1960-1996 civil war between the army and leftist guerrilla forces. He was just a young child when his family moved to Dos Erres, a farming community in

the Peten department. By the time Gomez was in his 20s, the military's scorched earth campaign was in full swing.

All told, the armed conflict left 200,000 dead and 45,000 disappeared. According to a United Nations-backed truth commission, military forces carried out acts of genocide in several indigenous Mayan regions.

The truth commission documented 663 massacres. One of them was in Dos Erres, where Kaibiles special forces killed more than 200 men, women, children and infants on December 6, 1982.

"My older brother died there. He was massacred by the soldiers," Gomez told Al Jazeera.

Gomez is part of a growing chorus of opposition to legislative initiatives in Guatemala and El Salvador that would grant broad amnesty to perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

Guatemala bill

In Guatemala, a bill to reform the National Reconciliation Law passed in the wake of the 1996 peace accords is making its way through a divided congress. The second of three readings of the amnesty bill took place Wednesday, sparking passionate interventions on both sides.

Motions presented Wednesday to send the bill back to a commission and to consult the Constitutional Court on the constitutionality of the bill both failed. The third debate and final vote could be scheduled as early as next week.

The bill would order the release within 24 hours of more than 30 military and paramilitary men convicted of forced disappearance, rape, massacres and other war-time atrocities. It would also shut down current and future trials. Six soldiers each sentenced to thousands of years in prison for the Dos Erres massacre are among those who will walk free should the bill pass.

"As victims, we hope that bill does not prevail," said Gomez.

Proponents of the bill argue the measure is necessary for the country to move forward. They claim left-wing interference in the judicial branch has led to biased and politically motivated prosecution of military officials. Many deny crimes against humanity occurred. The amnesty bill "would put an end to ideological persecution and the business of reparations," congress president Alvaro Arzu tweeted on Wednesday.

Congressman Amilcar Pop, an indigenous rights lawyer, rejects the arguments of amnesty advocates. Only one guerrilla fighter is among the convicts, but the ratio is roughly in line with the truth commission's findings, he said. The commission concluded the military carried out 93 percent of atrocities and guerrilla forces only three percent.

"Crimes during combat are not on trial and that is important to recognise," Pop told Al Jazeera. "What there are are attacks on civilians, minors, women, and even newborns killed in massacres," he said.

El Salvador initiative

In neighbouring El Salvador, a similar legislative initiative is the subject of growing controversy. An ad hoc commission of politicians is working on a draft bill to grant amnesty to perpetrators of war crimes.

The 1979-1992 armed conflict between the Salvadoran military and leftist guerrilla forces left an estimated 75,000 people dead and thousands disappeared.

As in Guatemala, the Salvadoran military's scorched earth and counterinsurgency campaigns included the targeting of civilians and massacres of whole villages. Also as in Guatemala, a truth commission concluded the military was responsible for the vast majority of atrocities.

Over the course of the conflict, the United States government provided billions of dollars and funding to the Salvadoran government.

A 1993 amnesty law prevented the prosecution of war crimes, but the country's Supreme Court struck it down in 2016. The ruling facilitated the current trial of high-level military officials for the December 1981 El Mozote massacre of nearly 1,000 villagers by a special forces battalion. More than half of the victims were children.

Survivors and relatives of victims of the El Mozote massacre are among the dozens of groups speaking out against attempts to bring back the amnesty. A bill to that effect would "generate a dysfunctional societal model based on impunity", according to a statement on Wednesday by the National Commission for the Search of Disappeared Persons during the Armed Conflict.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The protests of Salvadoran survivors and human rights groups have been echoed by international organisations. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet spoke out against Guatemala's amnesty bill earlier this year and has now also condemned its incipient counterpart in El Salvador.

"Amnesties for the most serious crimes under international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, are contrary to international law," Bachelet said in a statement Wednesday. "By effectively granting impunity to those guilty of serious crimes, it would make repetition of similar crimes more likely," she said.

More info

“Guatemala: Impunity for War Criminals, Again”

by Jo-Marie Burt and Paulo Estrada, February 5, 2019

https://nacla.org/news/2019/02/05/guatemala-impunity-war-criminals-again?fbclid=IwAR3rqum6YhGj1-mxx5ZzLdO3mEoalPzCp_-lluQ34RLqrVsFEd_rm4rwpww

“In Guatemala, are justice & the rule of law victims of a U.S.-Canada-Guatemala backroom deal?”

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/in-guatemala-are-justice-the-rule-of-law-victims-of-a-us-canada-guatemala-backroom-deal>

Need to hold U.S. and Canadian governments accountable

Keep on sending this information to your elected politicians in the U.S. and Canada holding them to account for their support for the Honduran and Guatemalan regimes, turning a blind eye to the systematic human rights violations, killings, corruption and impunity ... including now this very harmful attempt to give impunity to war criminals.

- United States: Contact your Senators (<https://whoismyrepresentative.com/>) and Congress members (<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>).
- Canada: Contact your Member of Parliament and make your demands known to them (<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>).
- Minister Chrystia Freeland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Global Affairs Canada, 1-613-992-5234, 1-343-203-1851; chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland.c1d@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland@international.gc.ca

Media silence

Send this information to your media contacts, urging them to start reporting properly on U.S. and Canadian complicity with the repressive, corrupt regimes in Guatemala and Honduras.

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