

Guatemala Election Watch #17 – August 14, 2023

Elections in Guatemala & the Global mining industry

By Grahame Russell

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/what-are-the-covenant-of-the-corrupt-regimes-in-guatemala-about>

What are the Covenant of the Corrupt regimes in Guatemala about? Read TESTIMONIO–Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of the Genocides in Guatemala, and find out!

6 days to August 20th run-off vote

What are the Covenant of the Corrupt regimes in Guatemala about? And why have the US and Canadian governments, and global mining companies and investors maintained beneficial relations with close to 70 years of these governments, usually referred to publicly as “democratic allies”?

On August 20, Guatemalans will have a chance to elect, arguably for the first time in 70 years, an actually democratic government. Find here Rights Action’s “Guatemala Election Watch” alerts (<https://rightsaction.org/emails>) summarizing some of what has happened recently, and what might happen leading up to and during the August 20 runoff Presidential election vote.

One can get a good idea about what the Covenant of the Corrupt regimes are about by reading TESTIMONIO–Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of the Genocides in Guatemala (Between The Lines, 2021, <https://btlbooks.com/book/testimonio>).

Dismissing all public rhetoric about ‘respecting democracy and the rule of law’, ‘promoting development and good governance’, the US and Canada, and our

companies and banks have long maintained mutually beneficial relations with Guatemalan governments and economic and military elites who are:

[the] people who planned and carried out the genocide of the Indigenous population and the murder of progressive ladino supporters and fellow citizens working for change. [T]hese are the very people who are signing agreements to allow Canadian mining companies (and others) to operate on the land occupied by those who survived the political violence of the 1970s and 1980s.

These are the very people and elite sectors of society who facilitated Canadian mining executives to rewrite the Guatemalan mining law back in the 1960s, and again in 1997, to profit most handsomely.

Our many meetings with Canadian ambassadors and their staff over many years only reinforce our understanding that the Canadian government's position is to encourage and facilitate Canadian mining operations in Central America at all costs, while turning a blind eye to, or even denying, the violence and harms. (Grahame Russell and Catherine Nolin, pp.5-6)



“The government can’t combat corruption. Corruption is the government”
Photo: FestivalesSolidarios

“Mining in the Guatemalan Mafia State”

Sandra Cuffe, in her *TESTIMONIO* article, does a deep dive into who comprise the Covenant of the Corrupt regimes, and whose interests they serve (pp.34-35):

A military coup clears the way for mining interests. Exploitation licenses are granted by military rulers. A mining company is directly involved in attacks and assassinations. A mining law is written by future mining company personnel. Exploitation licenses are granted by corrupt government officials. A transnational mining executive becomes a fugitive. Company and government officials coordinate police and military action to quell dissent. People’s homes are burned to the ground. People are killed.

The history of mining in Guatemala over the past sixty years is one of violence, corruption, and impunity. It is a history of transnational mining

companies doing whatever they need to in order to advance their interests, working with every government administration along the way, whether with genocidal military rulers or with administrations so corrupt that most top officials are now sitting in prison cells.

It is not an exaggeration. Guatemala has had eight presidents since the 1996 Peace Accords formally ended a thirty-six-year armed conflict. Six of the eight have faced, or are facing, some form of legal proceedings related to corruption, and it's unlikely the other two were exceptions to the rule. Mining companies have worked with all of these presidents and their administrations.

Prior to the Peace Accords, companies worked with successive military rulers engaging in horrific crimes against the civilian population.

Mining companies, the majority of which have been Canadian, have benefited and continue to benefit from this systemic violence, repression, and corruption.

Attention to the links between mining companies and impunity tends to focus on particular human rights violations against community leaders and anti-mining activists. However, impunity is tied to all aspects of mining from A to Z, with corruption and/or violence at every stage, from the creation of pro-mining laws and granting of concessions and licenses to land acquisitions, to operations, to closure, and beyond. Some of these dealings are questionable at best. Others are criminal.

Mining companies have been acting as criminal structures, hand in hand with the government," CALAS (Centre for Environmental and Social Legal Action) lawyer Rafael Maldonado.

Much has been published detailing the historic and contemporary reality of Guatemala and what the Covenant of the Corrupt regimes are actually about. Focused on the mining sector, *TESTIMONIO* documents the intersection of the

corrupted, repressive political system with the unjust, violent, local-to-global economic model that the Guatemalan people are working so hard to transform and change.

Since a US-orchestrated coup ousted Guatemala's last actually democratic government in 1954, the Semilla Party – favored to win the August 20 run-off election – offers the most hope to start to put an end to decades of this political, economic, military model, to start to transform the Guatemalan state and society in a direction that benefits the majority of long-dispossessed, mainly Mayan people, in a direction that respects Mother Earth and the environment.

It remains a fundamental challenge for the US and Canada, that our governments, companies and banks, political oversight bodies and judicial systems begin to assume responsibility for the actions of our governments, companies, banks and investors, when they violently intervene in the affairs of other countries, so as to put into power and/or help keep in power repressive, autocratic regimes that – simply put– favor our economic and political interests.

It is never too soon for the US and Canada to stop doing the wrong thing, and to start doing what our governments claim to do: promote and defend democracy and the rule of law, respect the autonomy of other countries, respect Mother Earth and the environment, promote and defend human rights and an economic development model that benefits all people.

Rights Action calls for Americans and Canadians to share this information widely (including media outlets), and to contact your Senators, Members of Congress and Parliamentarian. Urge them to make public statements and bring all pressures to bear on the Guatemalan authorities to ensure that the electoral process proceeds transparently and peacefully to the August 20 run-off vote, and that the Semilla Party is allowed to participate fully with no further attacks of any kind.

- Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact>
- House: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Parliament: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

More information

- Rights Action's "Guatemala Election Watch" alerts: <https://rightsaction.org/emails>

- Daily twitter feeds: Festivales Solidarios (@festivalesgt) / Prensa Comunitaria (@PrensaComunitaria)
- Prensa Comunitaria's daily news: <https://prensacomunitaria.org/>

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