



# El Quetzal

A Quarterly Publication

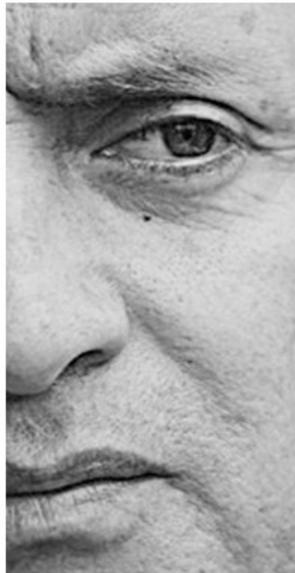
Issue #9

GHRC

March 2011

## Six Months to Examine the Past and Define the Future

As Guatemalan political parties gear up for the 2011 presidential elections in September, human rights organizations are preparing for some of the most important war crimes trials in the country's history. With a leading presidential candidate linked to one of the nation's most high-profile and controversial human rights cases, the way events play out in the next six months will be indicative of Guatemala's ability to confront the entrenched impunity from the internal conflict.



Implicated in the case is former General Otto Pérez Molina, the recently declared presidential candidate for the Patriot Party. Perez Molina was Commander of the Quiché military base in the early 1980s, during the height of the genocide against the Mayan population. He later became head of military intelligence, or G-2, infamous for carrying out forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions during the armed conflict. He has been directly linked to the massacres in the Ixil region of Quiché and as-

The case of Everardo Bámaca (born Efraim Bámaca Velazquez) has become an emblematic example of the ties between perpetrators of past violence and the current political and economic elite. Everardo, an indigenous guerilla leader from San Marcos, was captured on March 12, 1992. He was held and tortured for over a year by the Guatemalan military before being killed. His wife, American lawyer Jennifer Harbury, worked for two decades to piece together the complex series of events that occurred while Everardo was in captivity. She amassed a large

body of evidence that implicates a CIA asset and many high-ranking members of the Guatemalan military.

Jennifer presented the case to the Inter-American Court which, on November 25, 2000, found the Guatemalan military guilty of Everardo's disappearance, torture, and execution. However, it wasn't until 2009 that the Guatemalan government opened a criminal investigation and began to pursue the case.

sociated with the murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi in 1998. However, it is his connection to the torture and murder of Everardo Bámaca that may affect his bid for President.

### A History of Impunity

In Guatemala, where Peace Accords were signed after almost 36 years of war, the vast majority of crimes from the internal conflict remain in impunity. This is not

*Continued on Page 2*

### IN THIS ISSUE

Immigration Delegation Report.....	4	Voiceless Speak Recipient Finds NGO.....	8
AU Student Delegation.....	5	Human Rights UPDATE .....	10
Sociologist Murdered.....	6	Events and Announcements.....	11
Education for Children of Defenders.....	7		

## GHRC Mission

Founded in 1982, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a non-profit, nonpartisan, humanitarian organization that monitors, documents, and reports on the human rights situation in Guatemala, advocates for survivors of human rights abuses in Guatemala, and works toward positive, systemic change.

## Board of Directors

Kathy Ogle  
President

Amy Kunz  
Vice President

Joan Dawson  
Secretary

Janett Forte  
Treasurer

Yolanda Alcorta

América Calderón

Christina del Castillo

Gloria Jean Garland

John Leary

Jean-Marie Simon

## Advisory Board

Kit Gage

Jennifer Harbury

Sr. Dianna Ortiz

Sr. Alice Zachmann

Raul Molina

## Staff

Amanda Martin  
Director

Kelsey Alford-Jones  
Associate/Acting Director

## Interns & Volunteers

Erin Osterhaus  
Lucinda Woodward  
Paige Watson

## Six Months to Examine Past and Future

*Continued from Page 1*

surprising, considering that the intellectual and material actors responsible for torture, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and genocide were never held accountable during the peace process. Many have remained in positions of power, either openly as elected officials, or through clandestine criminal networks.

From local mayors to Supreme Court justices, Guatemala's public institutions are crawling with officials who benefit personally and professionally from continued impunity – and who aim to ensure that they are never held accountable for their crimes. Take, for example, the dictator responsible for the state-sponsored genocide in the indigenous highlands, Efraín Ríos Montt, who served as President of Congress from 2000-2004. He has avoided extradition to Spain on charges of genocide by returning to Congress for the 2008-2012 term.

The same weak and broken institutions that, by default, protect war criminals, have become infamous in the international arena for their failure to confront organized crime and gang violence. The UN-backed Anti-Impunity Commission (CICIG) has been working to prepare Guatemalan prosecutors and law enforcement bodies to investigate and dismantle this corruption. While advances have been made, the criminal structures have not been dismantled and, by some accounts, are gaining traction.

### Some Advances in War Crimes Cases

Meanwhile, a very persistent civil society and concerned international human rights community continue to demand justice for numerous key cases of human rights violations from the internal conflict. Many of these cases, which have languished for 20 to 30 years with little hope for justice,

are finally advancing and are gearing up to go to trial in the coming months.

- The Bámaca case, which implicates not only

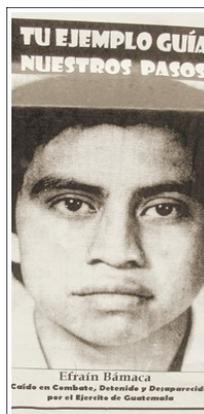
---

*With a leading presidential candidate linked to one of the nation's most high-profile and controversial human rights cases, the way events play out in the next six months will be indicative of Guatemala's ability to confront the entrenched impunity from the internal conflict.*

---

Perez Molina but also other high-level military leaders, has been moving forward, albeit haltingly, due to the continued pressure of Jennifer Harbury, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, and the international community. It has exposed rifts between Guatemala's Constitutional Court and Supreme Court of Justice, and has shone a spotlight on Guatemala's reluctance to comply with international law. In February 2011, Jennifer Harbury was finally allowed to give her testimony in Guatemalan courts. If the judicial proceedings were allowed to continue, the trial would take place in the next six months.

- The trial of three ex-soldiers charged for participating in the massacre of 251 men, women and children at Dos Erres, Petén, in 1982 is set to begin in July of 2011. The massacre was one of the largest of the conflict and was perpetrated by the Guatemalan special forces unit, the kaibiles. The case was opened in Guatemala in 1994 and after the government's attempt to shut it down, was taken to the Inter-American Commission. Despite open arrest warrants for 17 former kaibiles, only three men have been arrested in Guatemala. (In 2010 the US Justice Department issued arrest warrants for four other ex-kaibiles involved in the massacre; the men committed immigration fraud when they lied about their participation in the massacre on US citizenship forms. Gilberto Jordan was sentenced to ten years in prison in a Florida court in September 2010 and Jorge Vinicio Sosa Orantes, arrested in Alberta, Canada in January, may be extradited to Guatemala.)



*Continued on Page 3*

## Six Months to Examine Past and Future

*Continued from Page 2*

- The case of the 1984 forced disappearance of student leader Fernando Garcia went to trial in October 2010, and two former police officers were found guilty. The court made the unprecedented decision to order an investigation into their superior officers. A hearing for this case is also pending in the Inter-American Court.
- In December 2009, a Guatemalan colonel and three military commissioners were sentenced to 53 years in prison for the forced disappearance of eight people in the town of El Jute, Chiquimula. Colonel Marco Antonio Sánchez Samayoa is the highest-ranking military officer to be charged for crimes committed during the internal conflict, and his was only the second trial of forced disappearance in the country. (There were an estimated 50,000 people forcibly disappeared during the war.) This year, despite ongoing threats, the Victims Committee and the Mutual Support Group are planning to press charges against the military high command implicated in the case.
- Another important case, which charges ex presidents Efraín Ríos Montt and Fernando Romeo Lucas García, and the high military command during their administrations, with genocide during the period 1981-83, is also waiting its day in Guatemalan courts. Prosecutors and victims have demanded the release of four key military plans from the Department of Defense that provide evidence of the government's scorched earth policy in indigenous communities during the early 1980's, but the plans have not been produced in full. (Based on universal jurisdiction for war crimes, a separate case for genocide, state terrorism, torture and other crimes against humanity has also been brought before a Spanish court.)

The momentum of these cases has been bolstered by last year's appointment of Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey, a respected ally

of human rights organizations, as the new Attorney General of Guatemala. (The first candidate named was dismissed in June 2010 after only a few weeks due to his connections to organized crime.) The Colom administration has also made concerted efforts to vet the notoriously corrupt police force and, with human rights

---

*Because of the overlap between the perpetrators of violence related to past and current illicit activities, these war crimes cases have the opportunity to set a precedent for accountability for all human rights violations, while at the same time making progress in exposing Guatemala's deep-rooted system of corruption and organized crime.*

---

champion Helen Mack as Police Reform Commissioner, there is hope that some long-term positive changes can be made.

Because of the overlap between the perpetrators of violence related to past and current illicit activities, these war crimes cases have the opportunity to set a precedent for accountability for all human rights violations while at the same time making progress in exposing Guatemala's deep-rooted system of corruption and organized crime.

### A Limited Window of Opportunity

This window of opportunity, however, may be brief. Guatemalan public institutions, already consistently teetering on the brink of collapse, are vulnerable to pressure, threats and corruption. Increased violence and political conflict during this electoral cycle will further burden an already struggling judicial system.

The appointment of new judges to the

Constitutional Court, which occurred on March 14, 2011, will be an important test of the strength and independence of the judicial system. National and international organizations have demanded that candidates chosen to serve on the nation's highest court be independent, impartial, and honorable. These five magistrates will not only be responsible for ruling on the legality of a candidate's bid for president, but also will be integral in determining which human rights cases are tried in court.

Human rights defenders, such as Jennifer Harbury, her lawyer Edgar Pérez, and many others working on the war crimes cases, will be at increased risk during the coming months. The international community must monitor the progress of the elections and how they affect the concurrent human rights court cases in order to promote transparency, rule of law, and the protection of Guatemalan citizens' rights to truth, justice and accountability.

*-Kelsey Alford-Jones, GHRC Acting Director*



*Guatemalans march for justice, asking for Ríos Montt to be charged with genocide. (Photo: Jaime Rodriguez; mimundo.org)*

## Studying the Push Factors of Migration: an eye-opening trip back to Guatemala

by Amy Kunz

I served in a rural Guatemalan village in the Peace Corps for two years. I taught high school in Guatemala City for another two years after that. I read all the necessary books for my graduate thesis about its war, its culture, and its people. I even stood in Guatemala's cathedral in early 1998 as Bishop Juan Gerardi read from his own truth commission's report on war crimes and atrocities committed against the Guatemalan people for decades. Several days later I stood dumbfounded as I read the headlines announcing he had been bludgeoned to death. In short, I had fooled myself into thinking I was some kind of expert on Guatemala. Even given all my past experience there and in my present post as a Board Member of GHRC, I realized how much more I had to learn about the daily challenges of living in Guatemala. This quick education came to me almost immediately into GHRC's week-long delegation in late 2010.

The purpose of this particular GHRC delegation was to study the *push factors of migration*, to understand why people leave the land they know and love to move to a new one. It was an issue that has seen a lot of play in the media of late and it was a question that many of us on the trip wanted to explore deeper. My fellow delegates were all members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington (UUCA), Virginia, a highly committed and energetic group of people who want to walk the walk of the mission of their church, one based in working for social justice for all individuals. Several of the members had befriended a bright, articulate, young man named Victor in their community who migrated to the US from a small Mayan village in Guatemala when he was just a teenager. Victor came to the

US to find work and to send financial support back to his family, like many immigrants do. He had lived in several states and held many jobs before settling in the Washington DC suburb. It was Victor and his story that became the catalyst for this delegation to form.



November delegates from the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington meet with communities affected by migration and deportation in *Café Red*, run by DESGUA, in Quetzaltenango. (Photo: Mary Jean Schmelzer-Hoekstra)

Migration, we learned on the trip, happens both within the borders of Guatemala as well as outward. People move from their home villages to find work and income in other parts of the country such as the south coast to work in the sugar cane harvest, or to the northern region of the Peten to work in the industries surrounding popular tourist sites. They sometimes move back home for a while until the next harvest, but often must keep moving to follow the jobs all year round. The promise of steady, dollar-paying jobs, however, makes the lure of the United States almost impossible to resist for many Guatemalans, especially young men. Migration affected everyone in Victor's family. He and his brothers left their home in Guatemala's western highlands for the United States when they were all in their teens. Victor's parents are no stranger to migration themselves; they have crisscrossed Guatemala, leaving their home for months or years at a time,

following the promise of work according to crop harvesting schedules (potatoes in the highlands, sugar cane on the south coast, and coffee in the midlands).

By far the highlight of the trip, (if I can boldly speak for my fellow delegates here)

was the time we spent in Victor's small village of Toj Chan, Concepcion Chiquirichapa, just outside of Guatemala's second largest city Quetzaltenango, or Xela (pronounced Shay-la). We had planned only an afternoon meeting with the town's leaders and a tour of some of the projects completed and homes built thanks to remittances sent from family members in the States. Thankfully, GHRC director Amanda Martin, our delegation leader, accepted the town's repeated invitations that we stay overnight so that our visit

would not be so rushed and so that we could really get a taste of life in Toj Chan. We were greeted by a smiling brigade of children running down the steep incline, the entrance to Toj Chan, so we hiked up the hill exchanging greetings with our friendly ambassadors.

We convened in the school yard for a large public meeting with what looked like the entire population of the town. One by one the men and women of Toj Chan told us their stories of trying their luck in the US and the various reasons why they returned, or were sent back, to Guatemala. Nearly everyone in the schoolyard had personal experience migrating to the States or had a spouse or family members who had gone. All of the speakers said they never wanted to go to the US to work; they did not want to leave their homes, families, and the comfortable climate of Guatemala behind. But

*Continued on Page 10*

## Second Annual American University Delegation Investigates Impacts of Internal Conflict and Megaprojects

Working side by side a group of Maya Achí students from the New Hope Foundation School in Rabinal, American University delegates helped break the ground for a drainage ditch project that will protect classrooms from flooding during the rainy season. New Hope provides a unique, bilingual, bicultural environment, with a curriculum that provides core subjects, but using a pedagogy that recognizes and incorporates Mayan history and culture. Unlike the vast majority of schools in Guatemala, it also teaches about the internal conflict and its impact on the communities.

The activity with local students was one of the many exchanges during the alternative break delegation of 14 students from American University led by GHRC in January. The delegation traveled to Guatemala seeking to better understand the impacts of the internal conflict and current megaprojects on indigenous communities. During visits to Rabinal, Rio Negro and San Juan Sacatepéquez, the delegates saw evidence of the deep, long-term scars of the country's massacres and the often similar impacts of large-scale development projects.

Most students at New Hope are the children and grandchildren of the victims of Guatemala's internal armed conflict. Their daily reality is marked by a community still reeling from the impacts of a series of brutal massacres in 1982, in which over 5,000 people were killed. One of the largest and most well known is the massacre at Rio Negro, where 177 women and children were marched to the top of a mountain and executed.

The AU delegation visited the remote community for the second year in a row to hear testimony from survivors and understand the challenges for the families that have chosen to move back. The dele-

gation heard from community members about their constant struggle to receive adequate education and health services by the state. A community health clinic sits locked and boarded up, the medicines inside slowly expiring while the health center in Rabinal (a four hour hike away)



*AU delegates spend a day with students at the New Hope Foundation. (Photo: Ashleigh Mayo)*

continues to postpone the appointment of a community nurse. And, in one of the deepest ironies, the community still has no access to the electricity grid despite its location atop a hydroelectric dam. Yet local initiatives abound: improvements to the cultural center; new tourism projects; plans for a new soccer field.

Rabinal and surrounding communities have been leaders in promoting both legal justice for war crimes and historic memory in Guatemala. Students heard from NGOs in Rabinal about their fight to hold perpetrators accountable for the massacres, and for reparations for dam-affected communities, that has lasted almost two decades.

While communities press for justice in the courts, they also recognize the need for people to tell their story, for there to be a space for public recognition and reflection. In the absence of any comprehensive state programs to repair and rebuild, community organizations have shown resilience and creativity in working toward reconciliation. The region has be-

come an international example of the successful recuperation of historic memory as well as community-based education projects.

The delegation visited the newly-inaugurated photography and historic memory project displayed on the outer wall of the Rabinal cemetery accompanied by the Association for Justice and Reconciliation, one of the regions dynamic local organizations. The large mural tells the history of the Rabinal Achí community through art, photography, and written histories of the violence, weaving the violence of the internal conflict

into the rich cultural heritage amidst a legacy of marginalization and suffering, and the community's hope for a better future. Hundreds of victim's faces stare out at the road, reminding all who pass of the losses of loved ones and the need for truth and justice.

For the victims of the internal conflict, economic stability is as pressing a necessity as justice and reconciliation. Delegates visited two communities working with the 'Qachuu Aloom' (Achí for "Mother Earth") Farmer's Association an organic, local seed project that focuses on creating food security and sovereignty. Farmers who join the association receive an initial batch of native seeds and workshops on creating organic fertilizer. When the crop is harvested, the farmer keeps some seed for the next planting, prepares some for local sales, and gives some back to the Association. In this way, farmers can provide for their families, protect their land from intensive chemical inputs, and promote local, sustainable economic

*Continued on Page 10*

## Sociologist Murdered in Huehuetenango

On December 7, 2010, at 7:00am, Emilia Margarita Quan Stackmaann, a 33 year-old sociologist, was kidnapped with her driver, Víctor Manuel López Palacios, in Huehuetenango.

Her body was found the next day in “La Cruz de Canalix” between the municipalities of Chiantla and San Juan Ixcoy, Huehuetenango. Quan worked with the Center for Study and Documentation of the Western Border of Guatemala (CEDFOG) for the past five months of her short life. Her colleagues described her as happy, jovial, creative, and intelligent.

Quan and López were in CEDFOG’s gray Toyota Land Cruiser when they were intercepted by two armed individuals between the villages of Paquix, Chiantla, and San Juan Ixcoy. The two men carried high caliber weapons and forcefully boarded the vehicle without specifying the reasons for the kidnapping.

López was found alive—beaten and with his hands bound—close to the place where Quan’s body was discovered. After reporting the kidnapping to the National Civil Police, a blockade was immediately established at the entrance to the town of Barillas.

At 11:30am the day of the crime, the police detained a vehicle (of the same de-



*Emilia Quan’s murder prompted an outpouring of dismay and outrage by local and international organizations. (Photo: La Hora 12/10/10)*

scription above) driven by two men: Evelio Aristides Rivas, 36, and Jorge Hernán López, 18. Both men escaped. Rivas and López were from Huehuetenango. Rivas has a history of violent crime, drug trafficking, illegal transport of weapons, and disorderly public conduct.

After his escape, the police seized López in Barillas. He was later moved to the Santa Eulalia municipality for security purposes, but en route an angry mob of 2,500 people blocked the road and forced the Police to surrender López. He was “lynched.” Three hours later, the enraged mob, armed with machetes and sticks, arrived at the Barillas substation where Rivas was detained. He was forcefully removed and also lynched.

Various social and human rights organizations, including the Myrna Mack Foundation, the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, the Ecological Collective “Madre Selva” and the Organization of the United Nations have expressed their condemnation of the murder of Quan and de-

manded that the facts be clarified. The United Nations in Guatemala issued a statement condemning the murder and calling for the authorities to instigate “swift, exhausted, and efficient investigations, with the goal to identify, judge, and punish those responsible.”

In its 2010 annual report, the Guatemala Human Rights Defenders Unit (UDEFEQUA) reiterated its commitment to support legal action in the pursuit of justice in Emilia’s case.

### Human Rights Defenders Work Under Great Risk

Tragically, Quan is only one of eight human rights defenders who was assassinated in Guatemala in 2010, the vast majority of which are never fully investigated.

Human rights defenders interviewed by UDEFEQUA have expressed disillusionment with the justice system. The National Civil Police (PNC) received only 3% of complaints. The Public Prosecutor’s Office (MP) received the vast majority (over 80%) of all complaints and charges, while the Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office (PDH) received 6% of the reports.

### Violence Increases in 2011

While in 2010, threats and intimidation constituted the majority of aggressions, the first two months of 2011 have been more violent. Indigenous communities and activists have been targeted with persecution and illegal detentions, particularly when defending land rights. The communities around the Marlin Mine in San Marcos have come under violent threats, as have those speaking out against the Cement Mine in San Juan Sacatepéquez. Most recently, communities in Panzos, Alta Verapaz have been suffering violent evictions at the hands of state forces.



*Over 600 people marched in Huehuetenango one week after Emilia’s murder, demanding justice in her case. (Photo: Mike Castillo, Prensa Libre, 12/16/10)*

## GHRC Supports Education for Children of Human Rights Defenders

Thanks to a recent partnership between GHRC and St. Margaret's Church, Aipu' Bálam, son of murdered cultural leader Lisandro Guarcax, was able to continue studying after his father's death. Despite the grief and hardship of losing a father, Aipu' excelled in school [see letter below]. His mother would like him to continue his education, but like so many in her situation, doesn't know if it will be financially possible.

Aipu' was one of 16 children of human rights defenders who received educational scholarships from GHRC in 2010. The education fund provides opportunities for a child whose parent has been threatened, attacked, or assassinated. The support allows them to progress in the healing process during a traumatic time, and covers the costs of education when a family's

principal income-earner may have been killed or is no longer working.

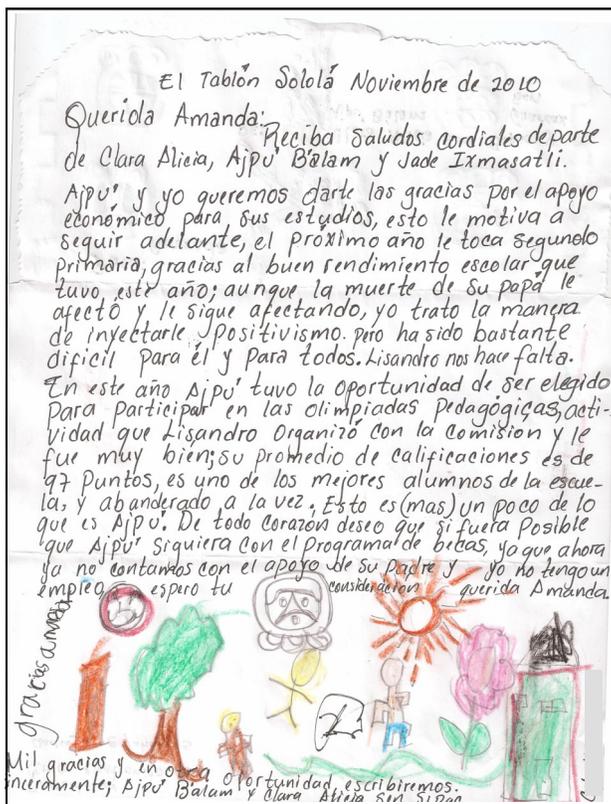
Children are one of the most vulnerable populations in Guatemala. According to the Guatemalan Archbishop's Human Rights Office (ODHAG), only one out of ten children in primary school reach middle school, and only one in 50 reach high school. Adolescents have few opportunities to access higher education or sustainable employment opportunities. Children and adolescents have also become targets of violence. In 2010, 459 children under 18 were killed with guns and other weapons.

The donations from St. Margaret's Church in Annapolis, Maryland, were given through the newly created fund in honor of Israel Carias Ortiz' two children

who were murdered in 2007. The fund was set up by the Guatemala Human Rights Defenders Unit (UIDEFEGUA).

On February 7, 2007, in El Hato, Los Achiotres, Zacapa, Israel and two of his children were murdered. The children, Ronal Aroldo and Ledwin Anilson Carias Ramirez, were accompanying their father, Israel, to buy medicine in the local state capital of Zacapa, for their very sick grandmother. From March to June 2009, the case went to court and the murderers were sentenced to 75 years (25 years for each murder).

GHRC is working to expand this program in order to provide continued educational support for children of defenders and raise awareness about the impacts of violence on Guatemalan youth.



### El Tablón Sololá November 2010

Dear Amanda,

Greetings from Clara Alicia, Aipu' Balam and Jade Ixmasatli. Aipu' and I would like to thank you for the financial support we've received for his studies. It's motivated him to continue with school. Next year he will start his second year of primary school thanks to the good grades he got this year. Although the death of his father has affected and continues to affect him greatly, I have tried my best to keep things positive, but it's been difficult for him and for all of us. We miss Lisandro.

This year Aipu' had the opportunity to be elected to the academic decathlon, an activity that Lisandro organized with the commission, and he did very well. His average grade was 97 points, and he is one of the best students in his school, as well as a leader in his class. So there's a little glimpse of how Aipu's doing. I hope with all my heart that it's possible for Aipu' to continue receiving the scholarship, since we can no longer count on his father for help, and I am not working. I wait for your consideration, dearest Amanda.

Many many thanks, and we'll write again soon.

Sincerely,

Aipu' Balam and Clara Alicia Sen Sipan

### Volunteer or Intern with GHRC!

Interested in getting more involved with the Guatemala Human Rights Commission? Let us know! Whether it is in our DC office or from afar, there are many opportunities to help out. Apply for a summer internship or help out with translations, mailing, and events in your community.

## Voiceless Speak Recipient Educates about Domestic Violence

As a survivor of extreme domestic violence, Ana Valdez has become an active voice in her community, advocating for women to know their rights and break free from abusive relationships.

With support from the 2010 Voiceless Speak Fund, she started her own non-profit organization, Angels Against Domestic Violence. The organization aims to provide education on the prevention of violence, and resources for women and families affected by domestic violence.

In a recent appearance on Radio America in Wheaton, MD, Ana introduced her fledgling organization, and with GHRC Acting Director Kelsey Alford-Jones, spoke to listeners about the phenomenon of femicide in Guatemala, and its relevance for the Latino community in the US.

Ana's draws her passion and motivation for the work from her own experience. Growing up in Guatemala, Ana knew that women were frequently abused by their partners. However, it wasn't until her family moved to the US that she also became a victim of domestic violence. In

2004, at the age of 18, Ana began to suffer abuse from boyfriend Carlos Ivan Ovalle. After three years of suffering in silence, and with two young daughters, she separated in 2007. Carlos, however,

of victims and survivors.

Although she was almost killed, Ana survived because of the quick and decisive response by local police. Had she been in Guatemala, she would probably have been killed by her ex-boyfriend. After the fact, the police might have carried out a half-hearted investigation. Most likely, no charges would have been filed, or if they had, there is a 99% chance that Carlos would have walked free.

Ana has collaborated with GHRC to educate the public about the pervasive violence against women in Guatemalan communities, both in Guatemala and in

the US. She expressed her gratitude to the GHRC and the Voiceless Speak Fund "for its support in this immense struggle against so much ignorance and suffering and in helping to create increased awareness."

"As a survivor of domestic violence I feel the necessity to confront and fight against this epidemic that has left so many dead," Ana says. "In my own attempt to break the cycle of violence, I hit so many obstacles and I know the fear and silence of a person who is suffering."

Ana sees her non-profit as the first step in a life-long process. She envisions that one day Angels Against Domestic Violence will be a resource for survivors not just in the DC-metro area, but regionally, or even nationally. "Domestic violence is a world-wide problem that in many cases has been covered up by women's fear, language barriers, lack of education, and the economic dependency common in our communities," Ana says. "Now I want to work towards eradicating it."

*If you are Guatemalan and are working to promote human rights in your community, or educate about the past or present human rights violations occurring in Guatemala, you are eligible to apply for a small grant. Learn more about the Voiceless Speak Fund on the GHRC website: [www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org).*

*Angels Against Domestic Violence, Inc.*



**Ana Valdez**  
President/Director

[www.aadvinc.org](http://www.aadvinc.org)      CELL (301) 404-5837  
[ana@aadvinc.org](mailto:ana@aadvinc.org)

would not leave her alone and in December 2008 hid in Ana's apartment in Takoma Park, waiting for her to get home. When she arrived, he beat her with a crucifix. A neighbor called the police, but when the officer arrived Carlos held a knife to her neck to prevent her from opening the door. Ana's daughter was able to let the police in and the officer shot Carlos twice; Ana was hit with the third.

Ana pressed charges and in 2009 Carlos was sentenced to life in prison for his

crimes. Ana has since gone through therapy and now speaks about her experience at public events and on the radio. She was recently honored by the National Center for Children and Families with the 2011 John F. White Alumni Award for her advocacy on behalf



Ana Valdez (second from right) stands with (from left): Oscar M Fernandez, Host and Co-producer of the Latino Media Collective radio program, Amanda Martin, GHRC; Kelsey Alford-Jones, GHRC; and Bethany Palmer, GHRC 2010 delegate.

## Human Rights *UPDATE*

### In Brief

December 10, 2011: **Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey was sworn in as the new Attorney General of Guatemala** by President Alvaro Colom. Paz y Paz is notable for her attention to the rights of the victims, as well as a dedication to the protection of human rights and her work with the CICIG. Her tenure as Attorney General will be effective for four years.

January 21, 2011: **Mindy Rodas found.** The body of Mindy Rodas Donis, a 23 year-old woman who survived her husband's attempt to cut off her face with a knife two years ago, was finally identified on January 17 by her mother. Her body, and that of another woman, was found on December 18, 2010 in Zone 1. Mindy was tortured and choked to death. The Survivor's Foundation helped her press charges case against her husband, whose trial date is set for June 2011.

January 21, 2011: **CICIG's mandate extended.** The CICIG's (Guatemala's UN-backed Anti-Impunity Commission) mandate was extended for an additional two years, until 2013. Seventy nations cosponsored this decision in conjunction with the UN.

February 18, 2011: **State of siege suspended in Alta Verapaz.** The state of siege was suspended after 60 days, though the President said he would not withdraw the security forces stationed there. The pretext for the declaration is the pervasive drug-trafficking activity in the department, but the action was largely considered a failure.

February 21, 2011: **Jennifer Harbury speaks publicly on the case of her husband, Everardo Bámaca.** After a year of work to move the case of Everardo Bámaca forward, Jennifer Harbury spoke with *La Hora* about her struggle for justice. The interview comes after the Bámaca Case was suspended again by the Constitutional Court on February 13.

March 9, 2011: **Bail denied for ex-kaibil wanted for war crimes.** Jorge Vinicio Sosa Orantes, a member of the kaibil unit (Guatemalan special forces) responsible for the brutal massacre of the community of Dos Erres, was denied bail in a Calgary court. The international community advocated strongly that Sosa not be granted bail, and that he be investigated for war crimes in Canada. Sosa was arrested in Canada after fleeing his home in Riverside, CA. Both the US and Guatemala have requested his extradition and his hearing is set for April 20.

March 14, 2011: **Constitutional Court (CC) magistrates elected.** The five judges on Guatemala's highest court will be tasked with deciding the legitimacy of presidential candidacies and will be integral in the advancement (or lack thereof) of Guatemala's key war crimes cases.

### Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

February 26, 2011: **Attacks against anti-mining communities in Juan Sacatepequez.** At midnight on February 26, 2011 after concluding religious ceremonies held in the Pilar 1 Community of San Juan, Sacatepequez, the deputy mayors and other remaining persons were attacked with fire arms and knives while closing up the mayor's office. Carlos Enrique Subuyuj Boch and Rosalio Subuyuj Raxon were gravely wounded in the attack and are in critical condition at the local hospital. The perpetrators, Alberto Raxon Equite and Rigoberto Raxon Subuyuj, are linked to the Cementos Progreso Enterprise. The community has previously denounced these men for similar acts, but the authorities at the Public Ministry have yet to take any action.

February 14 2011: **Murder of 3 Human Rights Defenders in Rio Dulce.** Three indigenous rights activists were found dead in eastern Guatemala. The bodies of Catalina Mucú Maas, Alberto Coc Cal and Sebastian Xuc Coc – who were active campaigners for the rights of the Quebrada Seca community and had been taking part in negotiations on a land dispute – and their friend Amilcar Choc, were found in a river. Other community activists have received death threats in recent weeks and members of the community believe they are now at risk and are afraid to work their lands and continue their daily activities.

March 15, 2011: **Organizations denounce the violent evictions carried out by Guatemalan police, military, and landowners in the Polochic Valley.** According to preliminary reports, 640 Q'eqchi' families dedicated to farming the abandoned lands of a defunct sugar-processing plant in Guatemala's Polochic Valley were violently evicted from their homes. Soldiers and National Police reportedly arrived at the community in 35 vehicles and proceeded to forcibly remove the campesinos, many of whom were left unemployed when the Chabil Utzaj plant closed in 2005. Antonio Bed Ac was killed and three others reported serious injuries.

### 2010 Statistics

- 29,095 Guatemalans deported from the US, an increase from 2009. This despite the country's request for Temporary Protected Status after Tropical Storm Agatha and the eruption of Pacaya volcano caused widespread devastation.
- 633 women brutally murdered in Guatemala. This is a slight decrease from 2009, which had a reported 708 deaths. The impunity rate, however, remains at 99%.
- 52 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, according to the most recent statistics, which place Guatemala fourth in the list of countries with the highest murder rates.

## Immigration Delegation Studies Push Factors

*Continued from Page 4*

they felt that they had no choice. Now they were glad to be back, but some did feel ashamed that they had to return before being able to fully support the family back home.

The strong community ties were never more obvious to me than in looking around the site of our meeting that night: the school. It was conceived of and built by members of the community, those who remained in Guatemala and those who work and live in the US. It is one of many community development projects



*Victor and GHRC Director Amanda Martin speak at the UUCA post-delegation event (Photo: Kelsey Alford-Jones)*

that have been completed in this way. The people of Toj Chan wanted a school in their own village so that the children would not have to walk far to attend classes and in that hopes that a good basic education would increase their chances of finding work in Guatemala. Other projects include a potable water system and a health clinic complete with its own ambulance down the hill in the larger town of Concepcion. I was amazed how many projects the villagers had done; it put my own Peace Corps service to shame.

That evening in Toj Chan we were finally able to meet Victor's parents and, in a particularly poignant moment, show them photos of their newborn grandchild, whom they have not yet met. Victor's mother reflected on how painful it was to have most of her children leave her for the US and at such young ages; "It's as if I never even had sons," she told the crowd. A large communal bed was made up for

us all inside the school and we spent a chilly night sleeping in the school that Victor and his fellow Toj Chan natives had help built from afar.

We finished off the week with a meeting at the US embassy where we told officials what we saw and the stories we heard. We knew that the majority of the people we met all through the week would never be granted such an audience so we had to speak for them. Thanks to a lively work session over the dinner the previous night and small group discussions on the bus ride from Xela to Guatemala City, we had specific stories to tell and questions to ask. We were pleasantly surprised to see three officials from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) there as well so we were able to press them on disturbing images described to us about detention centers and treatment of detainees.

If you believe that by joining a GHRC delegation it will get you a week's vacation in the tropics, you will be in for quite a surprise. It is full of work like reading and researching, rugged travel, heart-wrenching testimonies from people, and a lot of strategy sessions and thought processing; in fact, when you get back home, the real work begins. Each GHRC delegate promises to plan and carry out several tasks to further the cause of the delegation; many of my fellow travelers have jumped right into carrying out their promises. Some have attended meetings to relay what we saw and heard in Guatemala to the US State Department, others have visited an immigration detention center in Virginia to get an idea of what those who are about to be deported must go through, and still others have designed and will present a workshop on themes we studied at a conference this spring. All of the delegates helped plan a lovely fundraising dinner at UUCA for GHRC on December 12, 2010. During the evening delegates spoke of their experiences, a troupe of Guatemalan dancers performed, everyone enjoyed a typical Guatemalan meal, and a short video produced

by one of the delegates was shown. At one point, though, it all came back to Victor who had inspired the trip from the beginning. He approached the microphone that night too, thanking everyone for their visit to his village and looking around in hopeful amazement at the roomful of people who braved a cold, wet night in December to come hear stories about his small village on the side of a mountain in Guatemala.

## AU Student Delegation

*Continued from Page 5*

development. There are now about 150 families involved and the program is spreading to new municipalities. The students learned how to separate and clean the *chipilin* and *macuy* seeds, and helped replant a farmers seeds in a new plot.

The challenges these communities face in reweaving its social fabric and finding economic stability after such extreme violence and displacement is a situation replicated across the country.

On the final day of the delegation, students were received by the community of Las Trojes in San Juan Sacatepéquez, currently organizing against a mine and cement factory in the area. Much like during the internal conflict, San Juan's community leaders have been threatened and attacked, families have been divided, and many live in fear. The delegation bore witness to the aggressions experienced by the community and agreed to share their testimony with the international community.

Upon return to the US, students have remained involved in Guatemala solidarity work. A photography exhibit, featuring a series of photos from the visit to Qachuu Aloom, will open at Dos Gringos Café in Washington, DC on March 25. The students also met with the Department of State to share their experiences.

## EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CALENDAR

**March 8:** International Women's Day

**March 25, 5-8pm:** Opening of AU student delegation photo exhibit, Dos Gringos Café  
(3116 Mount Pleasant Street NW Washington)

**March 26-April 7:** GHRC speaking tour with Sandra Moran

**March 28-29:** Guatemalan cases heard at Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

**April 4, 6:30-9pm:** Norma Cruz speaks at American University College of Law

**April 4-11:** SOA Watch Days of Action in Washington, DC

**April 8-11:** Latin America Solidarity Coalition Education and Strategy Conference on US Militarism, Washington, DC

### Stay Informed

Visit our website and sign up for our list serve to receive urgent actions, event invitations, and other important information.

[www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org)

### The Guatemala Human Rights Commission Presents:

Working to End Gender Violence and Impunity!

Women's Grassroots Movements to Confront Violence Against Women and Promote Gender Equality in Guatemala



## with Sandra Morán

**What:** Events featuring internationally recognized activist for human rights Sandra Moran, who has worked with the Guatemalan women's and feminist movement for the past 20 years. She is a founder of the *Women's Sector*, an alliance of 33 women's organizations, and the founder of the first lesbian collective in Guatemala. See [www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org) for details.

### SCHEDULE:

**March 26—28:** Washington, DC, Arlington, Bethesda

**March 29—30:** Richmond, Charlottesville, and Winchester, VA

**March 31 & April 4:** Philadelphia, PA, Ewing, NJ, and West Chester, PA

**April 5 —6:** New York City, NY

**April 7:** Ithaca, NY

\*\* Interested in learning more about **violence against women** in Guatemala? \*\*

### Join a GHRC delegation in August 2011

Meet with NGO's, community leaders, and government offices

Share your experiences with the US Embassy

Return to the US with the knowledge and experience to better engage in Guatemala solidarity work

Contact [intern@ghrc-usa.org](mailto:intern@ghrc-usa.org) for more information.



Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

3321 12th Street NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
Tel: (202) 529-6599  
Fax: (202)526-4611  
www.ghrc-usa.org

NONPROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE PAID  
WASHINGTON, DC  
Permit NO. 469

Return Service Requested



# ***El Quetzal***

*A Quarterly Publication*

- ⇒ **Information about GHRC's Programs**
- ⇒ **News from Guatemala**
- ⇒ **Upcoming Events and Announcements, including GHRC's Spring Speaking Tour!**