



El Quetzal

Human Rights News and Updates

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Justice for Genocide in the Ixil?

“There was death every day.”

- Juan, genocide survivor-

In Guatemala’s Ixil triangle, during the early morning hours, the smoke from countless cooking fires rises to meet the misty fog that rolls down from the mountains. The result is a swirling whiteness that swallows everything... all color, all shapes, all detail.

For over thirty years that mist has concealed a heartbreaking history of violence, suffering and loss. From March 1982 until August 1983, a military dictator named José Efraín Ríos Montt ruled Guatemala. In an effort to defeat a guerilla movement in the countryside, he unleashed a brutal counterinsurgency campaign. With the intent of cutting the guerillas off from any source of social support, he implemented a “scorched earth” policy, targeting the Mayan indigenous population. The result was bloodshed and suffering on an unimaginable scale: massacres, assassinations, torture, rape, burning of homes and crops, and the complete eradication of villages.



(Photo: Plaza Publica)

Genocide survivor sworn in to court.

Between 70 and 90% of Ixil villages were razed between 1981 and 1983 and thousands of innocent men, women and children were killed— an estimated 5.5% of the entire Ixil population.

But on March 19, 2013 the fog of impu-

nity began to lift, and the details of this horrible history were made visible. General Ríos Montt and his then chief of military intelligence, General José Rodríguez Sánchez, sat in a Guatemalan courtroom to face charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.

For the next month, hundreds of men and women, witnesses, survivors, forensic experts, scholars and others took the stand to speak the truth: “aquí sí hubo genocidio”... yes, genocide happened here. Sitting in the courtroom, one could feel history being written. As lawyer Edgar Pérez proclaimed: “This is the moment that the victims have waited 30 years for!”

Then, on May 10, after weeks of uncertainty about the fate of the case, Judge Barrios read the court’s verdict to a packed

room. Describing the State’s violent campaign against the civilian population, the partial destruction of the Maya Ixil population and the general’s authorization and oversight of the military plans and operations, she stated: “the Court believes that

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GHRC Mission

The Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a non-profit, grassroots, solidarity organization dedicated to promoting human rights in Guatemala and supporting communities and activists who face threats and violence. GHRC documents and denounces abuses, educates the international community, and advocates for policies that foster peace and justice.

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Letter from the Director

Dear Readers: We have witnessed a truly incredible moment in Guatemala. General Ríos Montt was declared guilty of genocide and war crimes, a sentence that would have set a world-wide precedent for accountability, for even the most powerful sectors of society. And although the verdict was later annulled (in a questionable legal ruling), it's worth taking a moment to celebrate this fleeting triumph of justice, and recognize the immense bravery of the Ixil witnesses and the unwavering resolve of the lawyers, prosecutors and judges in the case.

Watching the trial unfold has been both heart-breaking and inspiring. I have been moved to tears by the testimony of survivors and deeply troubled by the ongoing attempts by the defense to stall, confuse, intimidate and ultimately derail the entire process. But when Judge Yassmín Bar-Ríos read the verdict, I was filled with hope for Guatemala. "Justice is a right for victims and contributes to rule of law in our country," she declared, looking up from her text and straight into the packed courtroom. "We believe that for a true peace to exist in Guatemala there must first be justice."

That the case has come this far is due, in large part, to the commitment of individual human rights defenders who are willing to risk their lives to work for justice. Repeated threats against the judges in the case, for example, are a clear reminder that judicial independence is still only as strong as the courage and willpower of the judges themselves.

As the case progressed, GHRC worked to coordinate international efforts around the trial, providing constant updates to the public, the media, and partner organizations. GHRC staff have been present in the courtroom and monitored the safety of those involved. And from DC, we have led successful government and grassroots advocacy efforts; almost 4,000 of you asked the US Ambassador to attend the trial, and close to 5,000 called on the Guatemalan Constitutional Court to hold true to the rule of law.

Yet this historic verdict – if upheld – will be only a partial victory if it doesn't translate into a long-term commitment to end impunity and address current violations.

Familiar patterns of violence have resurfaced fueled – as before – by racism, exclusion and persecution, particularly around indigenous and land rights struggles. Since the genocide trial began, I have received a continuous stream of urgent announcements of threats, attacks and as-

sassinations of community leaders; Xinca leaders kidnapped, one murdered; Daniel Pedro, kidnapped and assassinated; dozens of peaceful anti-mining protestors arrested and attacked in San Rafael...

GHRC is responding to these tragic events, providing emergency funds to mitigate risk and urging protections for human rights defenders, proper investigations and criminal prosecutions.

Yet it is clear that the political will does not exist to address underlying inequalities and ongoing abuses. In many cases, the Guatemalan government – often at the behest of big business – is criminalizing human rights defenders rather than holding perpetrators accountable, and has declared 'states of siege' that militarize entire municipalities and deny residents their constitutional rights.

While accompanying indigenous leader Lolita Chávez during our March speaking tour in DC, we spoke about the continuum of violence against communities in the Quiché. "We were silenced by the war," she told me, "but now we are speaking out. The government responds with repression [but] we continue to organize peacefully against a new invasion of our lands."

As the United States increases 'security' assistance in the region, we too must continue to speak out against US policies of militarization, and call for accountability from our own government to ensure we do not, once again, contribute to systemic abuses.

I am continually heartened by the strengthening of our solidarity movement, and the thousands who are taking action through emails, calls, and direct accompaniment – ready to support Guatemalans in this tense time of uncertainty and increasing violations. Our collective action reaches communities from Izabal to Huehuetenango, as well as the Guatemalan diaspora.

The stories in these pages —linking past and present, Guatemalan and US activists —remind us that we are part of a movement that transcends borders, seeking positive change and respect for human rights in our own communities as well as abroad. Thank you for reading and for joining GHRC in these efforts.

With gratitude,



Kelsey Alford Jones

Genocide Trial

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the actions of Efraín Ríos Montt are consistent with the crime of genocide.”

Ríos Montt was escorted from the courtroom amidst a sea of journalists and the spontaneous eruption of song by emotional onlookers. Yet only ten days later, the Constitutional Court annulled the verdict, a move that was heavily criticized inside and outside Guatemala, and will imply months—if not years—of legal battles.

Justice in Guatemala, Justice in the World

This trial marks the first time in world history that a former head of state has been tried (and found guilty) of genocide by a nation’s own justice system. Other similar cases, such as the trials at Nuremberg or the case of social cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, were prosecuted outside the country by international judicial bodies. Over a decade in the making, this is a precedent-setting case that could have positive implications for similar cases against other dictators and military officials in Guatemala, Latin America, and around the world.

And Justice for All

During the trial, an expert witness testifying against the generals was asked “if what you say is true, why did you wait three decades to denounce this?” It was a valid, if highly ironic, question. The truth

is that the Guatemalan judicial system has traditionally been at the service of the wealthy and the powerful. Impunity has been the norm, justice the exception. Despite the fact that the armed conflict, which ended in 1996, claimed the lives of over 200,000 people, to date, only a handful of lower-ranking officials, soldiers and paramilitary have been incarcerated. High-ranking military and government officials, such as Ríos Montt, were seen to be untouchable... until now.

That the structures of impunity are under attack is in great part due to the work of Guatemala’s Attorney General, Claudia Paz y Paz. Appointed in December 2010, she won the first convictions against officers accused in some of the worst massacres. “It’s sending the most important message of the rule of law — that nobody is above the law,” she said.

Lest Ye Be Judged

One of the most commanding figures of the trial has been Judge Yassmin Barrios who has kept the trial moving forward, in strict adherence to law, despite the constant attempts by the defense lawyers to obstruct the judicial process.

For her perseverance and steadfastness she has received criticism, condemnation, and contempt from military supporters and genocide deniers. Human rights organizations are extremely concerned for

her safety.

Si Hubo Genocidio – Yes it was Genocide

During the trial, over a hundred survivors and witnesses to genocide bravely made the long trip from the Ixil region to Guatemala City to testify a mere feet away from the men who masterminded the bloody massacres that killed their families and destroyed their communities.

The Mayan people were targeted during the conflict because of their ethnicity. It wasn’t because of their political affiliations or involvement in the guerrilla. Many of the survivors testified that, to this day, they don’t know why the army came to kill them. Army documents presented in trial outlined how the entire population was defined as the “internal enemy.” Being Mayan in the Ixil region of Guatemala during the dictatorship of Ríos Montt was, quite simply, a death sentence.

One of the most damning arguments that supported the charge of genocide is that military forces targeted indigenous children. Soldiers cut unborn infants from their mothers’ wombs, threw babies into the air to spear them with bayonets, and swung children by their ankles, smashing their heads against trees until they were dead. Children were shot. Children were stabbed. Children were burned alive.

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Former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt in court the day he is sentenced to 80 years in prison.

Genocide Trial

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Why were the children killed? Because they were Mayan Ixil.

GHRC's own Dania Rodríguez testified in the trial. She was called on to answer questions about her work as a social anthropologist with the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG). Through interviews conducted with community members, exhumations of clandestine graves, DNA sampling, and forensic analysis of the skeletal remains, the FAFG was able to provide clear and abundant scientific evidence to corroborate the testimonies of the massacre survivors.

Among the most remarkable expert testimonies was that of Héctor Rosada Granados, who headed up the governmental commission that negotiated the Peace Accords with the URNG guerrillas. "In the Ixil area, from 1981 to 1983, the State used the Army to systematically commit the crime of genocide," he said. The Guatemalan State, in its fervor to defeat the guerrillas, went from "a counterinsurgency war to a war against the civilian noncombatant population" which it had defined as "the enemy." This genocide is demonstrated by the "frequency, repetition, and widespread nature" of the "brutal acts" perpetrated by members of the Army against the indigenous mem-

bers of this ethnic group.

The Survivors Speak

"I saw when they killed an elderly woman. The army officials cut off her head. Then they entered the kitchen and played with her head as if it were a soccer ball." – Julio, who was eight years old at the time.

"All I found were my son's bones. Animals had already eaten his body." – Pedro.

"One of my little brothers was hiding in the cornfield, crying. The soldiers came and cut his throat with a knife." – Domingo.

"I saw this. They burned the first house and burned the whole family inside. There was screaming inside, the children, the women, they were burned to ash. Later, when the military finished killing the pregnant women, they came down to the catechist's house. He thought they wouldn't kill him and so he started to pray inside his house. But then they put the mayor inside and they shot at the house killing the whole family, his whole family. They killed him." – Tiburcio

"I'm here to testify because I suffered, I was raped. For three nights I was there, I

The Historical Clarification Commission report – Guatemala: Memory of Silence

"Faced with several options to combat the insurgency, the State chose the one that caused the greatest loss of human life among non-combatant civilians. Rejecting other options... the State opted for the annihilation of those they identified as their enemy. In consequence, the CEH concludes that agents of the State of Guatemala, within the framework of counterinsurgency operations carried out between 1981 and 1983, **committed acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people...**"

was raped. I couldn't move, I couldn't walk. They hit me as if I was a ball. That's what hurts me, they made me suffer." – A survivor of sexual violence.

"We were treated like animals, worse than animals. If we kick a dog, afterwards we feel bad. We are not dogs." – Juan

Indian Seen, Indian Killed

A surprising turn of events, and one which has been blamed by some for a sudden halt to the trial, came during day 10 of proceedings, when a protected witness testified that Guatemala's current president, Otto Pérez Molina, was involved in the Ixil massacres.

Former Army Specialist Hugo Ramiro Leonardo Reyes testified that his superior, Pérez Molina, ordered the roundup of villagers for transport to military outposts, where they were then executed. "The soldiers, on orders from Major 'Tito Arias,' better known as Otto Pérez Molina, coordinated the burning and looting, in order to later execute the people... Those who were brought to the military base to be executed arrived beaten, tortured, with their tongues cut out, with their fingernails pulled out, among other injuries." Reyes added: "As far as I could tell, the order was 'Indian seen, Indian killed.'"

A Defenseless Defense

It was obvious from the very first moments of the trial that the defense lawyers



(Photo: MiMundo.org)

An Ixil woman embraces Nobel Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchu as the crowd celebrates the guilty verdict.

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Genocide Trial

representing Ríos Montt and Rodríguez Sánchez were more interested in delaying and derailing the trial than defending their clients.

Before being expelled from the courtroom by Judge Barrios on the first day of the trial, Ríos Montt's lawyer Francisco García Gudiel went off on a nationalistic rant. "Guatemala is a country of ingrates! We forget about all the good things we have as soon as the foreigners show up to provoke conflict." Gudiel was allegedly contracted just that morning to defend Ríos Montt, in an effort to force Judge Barrios off the case.

Then, on April 18, just as closing arguments were to be heard --days before the final verdict-- the trial slammed to a sudden and unexpected halt. The entire defense team abandoned their clients in the middle of the trial, stating, "We do not want to be participants in this illegal debate."

Meanwhile, the prosecution lawyers, sur-

vivors, social movements and human rights organizations resolutely continued the struggle for truth and justice. Dubious legal maneuvers by the defense lawyers found their echo in a justice system still steeped in corruption. The trial was suspended as the Constitutional Court, Guatemala's ultimate legal authority, deliberated on over a dozen legal motions before handing the case back to Judge Barrios.

Despite the lack of evidence or witnesses presented by the Defense, they will surely appeal the ruling, again hoping to tie up the case in legal knots.

The Backlash: Trying the Case Outside of the Courtroom

Ultraconservative pro-military individuals and organizations carried out a non-stop campaign of attacks, defamation, and disinformation throughout the trial. The Foundation Against Terrorism, a right-wing extremist group took out two paid supplements in a national newspaper attacking and slandering the victims, hu-

man rights organizations, the Catholic church, Attorney General Paz y Paz.... even murdered Bishop Juan Gerardi.

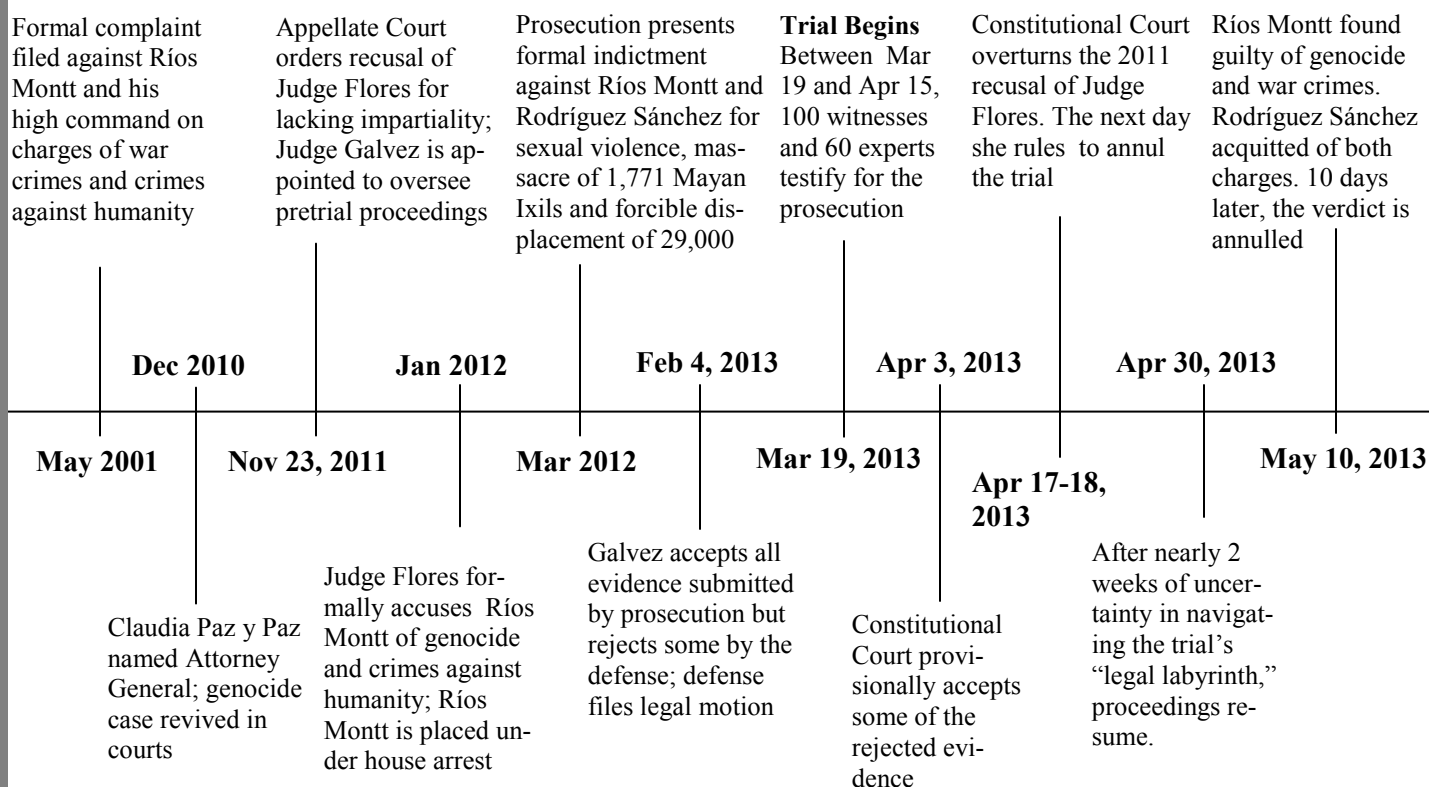
"All I ask for is justice, so that my children will never have to live through what I lived through."

– Pedro, Genocide Survivor –

Meanwhile, a group of 12 Guatemalan "intellectuals," all former and current government officials, took out an advertisement entitled: "Betraying the Peace and Dividing Guatemala." The document claims that "the accusation of genocide against officials of the Guatemalan Army [...] entails serious dangers for our country, including the deepening of social and political polarization, which will undo the peace that has been achieved to date." They further warn that a guilty verdict in the genocide trial could signify the

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Key Moments of the Genocide Case



Genocide Trial

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“imminent danger of renewed political violence.” Current President Otto Pérez Molina stated that he not only agrees with the ad, but that he also personally endorses its content.

Human rights and survivors’ organizations denounced these blatant attempts to try the genocide case in the media instead of the courtroom, to make this a political issue instead of a judicial one. Concern about violent retaliation after the sentence was so great that a US embassy statement specifically called for Guatemalans to “respect the legitimacy and integrity of this process,” and to express any disagreement through “existing legal channels.”

Reagan & Ríos

The United States, of course, has played its own nefarious role in the suffering and death of the Ixil people. Soon after taking office in 1981, President Ronald Reagan’s national security team agreed to supply military aid to Guatemala’s brutal dictatorship in order to pursue the goal of exterminating not only “Marxist guerrillas” but also their “civilian support mechanisms.” Declassified CIA and State Department cables confirm that although his administration had knowledge of the massacres and repression being carried out against the indigenous population, Reagan continued to support the general and his regime, paying a visit to Guatemala City in December 1982.

After the meeting with Ríos Montt, Reagan hailed the general as “totally dedicated to democracy” and added that Montt’s government had been “getting a bum rap” on human rights. “President Ríos Montt is a man of great personal integrity and commitment. ... I know he wants to improve the quality of life for all Guatemalans and to promote social justice.”

More than Justice, the Truth

This historic verdict has implications far beyond the case itself. There has been a shift in public consciousness from silence and forgetting to debate and remembrance, marking a new reality for Guatemala. The testimonies of the courageous men and women seeking to bring these two genocidal generals to justice have helped unmask an entire structure of racism, oppression, and violence, and are an irreplaceable contribution to historic memory, for Guatemala and the international community.

With the Constitutional Court’s ruling to annul the verdict, the future of the case is, once again, a complete uncertainty. Yet the words spoken by survivors, the truths they told, these cannot be erased –and they will not be forgotten.

The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, ratified by Guatemala in 1949, states: Genocide means **any** of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in **part**, a national, **ethnic**, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

GHRC Delivers Petition After October Massacre in Totonicapán

On February 22, 2013, GHRC met with the new Governing Board of the 48 Cantones of Totonicapán to share the work GHRC had done in response to the killings perpetrated by state forces on October 4, 2012.

GHRC Director Kelsey Alford-Jones described the actions that had been carried out from GHRC’s Washington office, including a petition signed by over 10,000 people from around the world. The petition had been presented to the Guatemalan Interior Ministry and the President’s Office in December 2012, and in the meeting GHRC presented a copy to the 48 Cantones.

The signatories denounced the use of state violence against indigenous Guatemalans and reiterated support for the right of the K’iche people and the 48 Cantones

of Totonicapán to express their collective political voice. The petition also expressed condolences to the families of the six deceased victims and solidarity with the more than 35 wounded, including women, children and the elderly.

The petition concluded with a call to the Attorney General, the President of Guatemala, the Judiciary, and the Human Rights Ombudsman to fulfill their respective mandates and shed light on the events of October 4. Likewise, it asked both the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international bodies to intervene and ensure thorough and effective investigation and institutional reforms take place to prevent the repetition of these acts.

The leadership of the 48 Cantones of Totonicapán accepted the petition and ex-

pressed their concerns about the developments thus far in the trial against the soldiers, as well as the current living conditions of the families of both the killed and wounded. Most of these families have limited resources and, in the case of the injured, are in need of long and expensive treatments for recovery. Due to their convalescence, these primary breadwinners can’t work to support their families.

The Board also urged the US government to maintain the ban on funds to the Guatemalan Army.

GHRC has since awarded emergency funds to the families of three people injured in the massacre. The funds come from the Human Rights Defenders Fund, and are intended to assist with urgent expenses born by the victims of violations.

GHRC Board Member Testifies for Genocide Case in Madrid

By Jean-Marie Simon

In April 2013, I traveled to Madrid to testify before the Spanish National Court in the ongoing trial against general José Efraín Ríos Montt. The trial began in 2006, when the Court charged the former dictator with gross human rights violations committed during his seventeen-month rule, leaving tens of thousands of civilians dead or “disappeared” in the most brutal civil war in twentieth century Latin America.

The suit was brought under Spanish law on the legal principle that the charges of “genocide” and “crimes against humanity” are so egregious that they warrant relief even outside the territory where they allegedly have been committed. In addition, the plaintiffs, Guatemalan Mayans whose relatives had been killed, believed that domestic courts would either refuse to hear their case or that they would face reprisals for having dared to bring suit against a military perceived as monolithic and omnipotent.

My testimony before Judge Santiago Pedraz was based on testimony I had recorded during my eight years working for Time magazine and as the Guatemala representative for Human Rights Watch.

Because Judge Pedraz had already received eyewitness testimony from survivors and other human rights experts, I focused on disproving Ríos Montt’s assertion that he was unaware of the gross human rights violations carried out, largely by his own army, from March 1982 until August 1983. Ríos Montt contradictorily has claimed either that he knew nothing of rural massacres or that he indeed controlled the army under his command, thus implying that he was informed of such abuses.

Instead of trying either to prove liability based on command responsibility for one’s troops, or to demonstrate gross negligence as commander in chief, I focused instead on an unlikely but obvious quarter: the Guatemalan press. The purpose in showing Judge Pedraz news clippings from this period was to quash Ríos Montt’s claim that he was unaware of massacres in the countryside. How was it



Jean-Marie with Judge Pedraz and Sofía Duyós, an attorney with Madrid Paz y Solidaridad de CCOO, who has worked on the genocide case since 1999.

possible for a head of state to be less informed than the tens of thousands of citizens who saw these headlines daily?

By the 1980’s the quasi-independent press corps had been decimated: the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists counted 29 local journalists killed since 1981, while dozens more were forcibly disappeared or fled to self-imposed exile abroad. With few exceptions the remaining press took one of three paths toward self-preservation. The majority opted for meticulous self-censorship by dutifully suppressing what they saw in the countryside, with the two remaining groups split between “faferos,” - propagandists whom the military paid to re-invent the war - and government “orejas,” literally “ears,” who the government paid to inform on their own colleagues. As a result, the common assumption was that Guatemala’s journalist corps was sufficiently cowed to avoid even the most ministerial reporting on human rights violations.

Surprisingly, the truth was something else. In fact, Guatemala’s five daily newspapers, still published breaking news, even in remote highland villages where most massacres occurred. As a result, throughout 1982 and into 1983, as violence peaked under Ríos Montt’s policy of “shoot whoever flees,” the Guatemalan press reported dozens of massacres.

I showed Judge Pedraz photographs of newspaper headlines published between May and July 1982. One headline read:

“100 Peasants Dead”; another reported, “Eighty-Five Dead in Baja Verapaz.” There were dozens of other headlines containing similar information. Surprisingly, the accounts contained valuable details: the victims’ full names; their age and origin; and details of how they died. The only omission was the perpetrators’ identity, which the press prudently attributed to “unknown

assailants,” “men in olive green uniforms,” and “unidentified terrorists.”

In conclusion, and perhaps in a small watershed moment, I showed Judge Pedraz two editorials published in the morning daily, “El Gráfico,” six weeks after Ríos Montt took power. The author of both columns was an unlikely human rights defender, ultra-conservative newspaper publisher and politician Jorge Carpio Nicolle. He asked rhetorically how it was possible to behead eight-year-old children. For good measure, Carpio added that massacres had become “the order of the day....” The target of Carpio’s accusation was obvious, and it was only through his standing in Guatemala’s small but powerful circle of elites that he avoided persecution. (Carpio Nicolle was assassinated in July 1993.)

Judge Pedraz sat in silence as I showed my eighty photographs of the war, ending with the newspaper headlines taken straight from the mouth of Guatemala’s own beleaguered press corps. At the end, as I put away my laptop, and following the perfunctory thanks for my testimony, Judge Pedraz’s sole words to me were, “You told me something I had not heard before.” A sign, perhaps, that my testimony has shed new light on the case against Ríos Montt.

Jean-Marie Simon is a GHRC board member and the author of “Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny” (WW Norton, 1987).

Delegation with American University's Alternative Break Program: The Indigenous Struggle for Rights and Recognition after Genocide

By Nellie Mitchel

Guatemala is a complicated country. For me it was confusing, frustrating and awe-inspiring when I visited in January 2013 with a group of 12 other American University students on a delegation led by GHRC. The purpose was to delve into the topics of indigenous rights and reconciliation after conflict. Through the delegation, we learned that in Guatemala you can neither understand these issues in isolation nor separate the past from the present. In this spirit, our trip brought together powerful movements including those seeking justice, historical memory, cultural preservation and environmental equity.

We spent the first day of the delegation in Guatemala City, where we met with the Unit for the Protection of Guatemalan Human Rights Defenders (UDEFEUGA), Families of the Guatemalan Detained-Disappeared (FAMDEGUA), and Guatemalan Foundation for Forensic Anthropology (FAFG) to establish a context of the country's history and its current human rights situation. We were overwhelmed just hearing about the immense work these prominent individuals and organizations have taken on.

These themes began to come to life for us on the second day, when we visited the community of San Antonio Las Trojes, San Juan Sacatepéquez and learned of their six year struggle against *Cementos Progreso's* mining of their land. From the tower of their church, a community leader pointed out sacred ancestral spots that they could no longer access because



Student's Visiting Rio Negro (Photo:Nobuaki Tanaka)



Students listening to a presentation in FAFG's laboratory. (Photo:Nobuaki Tanaka)

of the company's work, and explained to us how the homogeneity of trees in the area are the result of the company reforestation effort. This unnatural environment is completely void of the wildlife and biodiversity that once inhabited the forest. As overwhelmed as I was by the injustice of their circumstances – *Cementos Progreso's* complete indifference to their right to consultation and a healthy environment, and the government's bias in favor of the company – I was also overwhelmed by the community's gratitude towards the AU delegation for returning to their community for the third year in a row.

The next stops for our delegation were the Maya Achí community of Río Negro and the nearby city of Rabinal, where we learned through first-hand testimony of the construction of the Chixoy dam, the related massacres, and what the community and human rights activists are doing to reconcile this unjust history. Community members, particularly survivors of the 1982 massacre, have taken on the immense responsibility of ensuring their story is kept alive.

We spent a physically and emotionally strenuous day hiking up a mountain to Pak'oxom, where 177 women and children were massacred. Along the way, our

guide stopped to explain the events of the day and add his personal experiences as a young boy who was left behind while his mother and siblings were marched to their death. In total, there were a series of five massacres committed against the people that were peacefully defending their ancestral land against a massive hydroelectric dam. This tragedy was caused by the government's desire for an economic development project, funded by loans from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, within the context of the brutal internal armed conflict and scorched earth policy.

Other days were more uplifting, especially the day we visited the school *Nueva Esperanza*, which uses an innovative approach to educate students about their indigenous culture, their people's history, and community sustainability through collaborative, hands-on learning. The spirit of the children and the pride they took in their heritage inspired us as they performed a traditional Maya Achí play, providing hope for a future of cultural richness and strong community leadership.

Our trip ended with a day that was both infuriating and incredibly inspirational. We visited *La Puya*, in San José del Golfo and saw how people from the surrounding area, from all walks of life, have come together to resist an international company's invasion of their land. Hearing resistance leaders speak of the blatant abuses in the hands of the government and a US company made us realize

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Genocide Survivor Adrian Ventura Shares Memories

On March 1, Adrian Ventura, survivor of the genocide in Guatemala, addressed a crowd at Georgetown University which included activists, academics, ambassadors and genocide survivors from other countries. He was there to share his experience, and contribute to an effort to understand the crime of genocide in order to prevent it in the future.

Dressed in the colorfully embroidered black wool *traje* traditionally worn by indigenous leaders in Chichicastenango, Adrian arrived at Georgetown University Law School prepared to represent his people and recount his story. When his turn came, he detailed his experiences as a child in El Quiché, and how his family suffered through the government's scorched earth policies that sought to exterminate the population, armed or civilian.

He explained that, beyond bombs and guns, the government used psychological torture against the people. Soldiers rounded up villagers, gunned down children and raped young girls and women in front of their families. The intent, he said, was for word of the atrocities to spread through the villages, sowing fear.

Adrian harrowingly recounted how, at only nine years old he was separated from his family. One day, he said, soldiers came to his village. He hid in his house with his family, sure they would all be killed. The soldiers set fire to the forest surrounding the houses and soon his family's house caught fire as well. They

fled, scattering in different directions to escape the flames. Adrian described having to cover his face and run through the smoldering woods to get away. In the process, he lost track of his parents and siblings and was forced to flee to Mexico without them.



Adrian Ventura in traditional clothes from Chichicastenango, Guatemala.

When this happened, he said, "We thought the whole world was our enemy. They didn't explain why they were doing this to us. We were only children. We didn't participate in the army or the guerilla, yet we paid the price for the government's problems."

Adrian gave his testimony alongside survivors of the Jewish Holocaust, the genocide in Biafra and the genocide in Cambodia. Each survivor recounted what they

had suffered as attendees tried to make sense of the stories and find clues as to how to prevent recurrences. As he spoke, Adrian voiced the fear which was at the heart of the conference. "I have children and I fear that another genocide will be carried out, in this country or another, because the causes of the genocide remain."

Adrian had a simple prescription for prevention. "The only medicine to create change, improvement and prevention is justice for survivors. Justice for genocide would mean we could reclaim our dignity and our memory." And yet, he said, there is no cure for victims. "We will always suffer in our heart and soul from the trauma caused by the government."

Nevertheless, he explained, knowing that people acknowledged their suffering, and that they stand with the indigenous people of Guatemala, was an important form of support.

At a GHRC event the night before, Adrian expressed his gratitude for ongoing international engagement. "When the government of Ríos Montt gave the order to kill all Catholic and indigenous leaders, we were alone. It was like we were in a tunnel, in the dark with no-where to go. We could only hear the bombs, the grenades, the rifles....But it makes me happy to know that now there are many people who pay attention to us and recognize that we have dignity. I want to thank everyone for getting involved and listening to us."

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how grave Guatemala's situation still is.

What was most powerful for the students was seeing communities in resistance at every stage in the process, from the community of Rio Negro that was nearly wiped off the map 30 years ago, to people who were approaching their one year anniversary to resistance at *La Puya*.

Yet the strongest impression this trip left me with was the perseverance of each community. Rio Negro miraculously persevered through the government's attempt to eliminate them, and bravely re-

turned to rebuild their community and share their story. San Juan Sacatepéquez has weathered criminalization, bribery, and violent attacks. People around San José del Golfo have dedicated their constant attention to halting Kappes, Kassiday & Associates in its tracks. It is frightening to see the same pattern of oppression and abuse of power play out over and over again, yet amazing to see that communities, through non-violent peaceful resistance, are proving to be a true force to be reckoned with.

As I still struggle to untangle what to do with all that I have learned in Guatemala,

I remember how grateful the communities were that we were present and bearing witness to their stories, whether they were decades-old stories rich in the historical memory of the community, or current struggles communities face night and day. It's clear to me that the first step to showing our solidarity is to share these stories, and do everything we can to stand behind Guatemalans fighting for justice.

Nellie Mitchell was a student leader of the AU alternative break trip. This was her second trip to Guatemala with GHRC.

American University Delegation

Recent Attacks on Land Rights Activists Raise Alarm

While the world watches the genocide trial in Guatemala, indigenous peoples and human rights defenders today are suffering persecution very similar to that perpetrated in the 1980s.

During the internal armed conflict, those who spoke out to defend their rights were systematically assassinated by the State. This violence was part of a government strategy that sought to maintain an economic system that benefited a small minority of elite families, leaving the indigenous majority in conditions of poverty. The State tried to justify its tactics by labeling these citizens as “internal enemies” who threatened Guatemala’s stability.

This violence and repression continues today. Activists who reject the government’s economic policies, and demand that their vision of development be respected, are again facing accusations of being internal enemies or terrorists. Some are victims of threats, assassination attempts, and extrajudicial executions, while others have been jailed under false criminal charges, becoming the nation’s first generation of political prisoners. Persecution comes not just from the State, but also from the private sector: national and multinational companies seeking to protect and expand investment opportunities, and their security firms, many owned by former military officials, that act as the companies’ private armies.

Guatemala’s human rights situation has deteriorated since the beginning of 2013, and a series of recent attacks has caused alarm, both nationally and internationally. The Guatemala Human Rights Defender Protection Unit (UEDEFEGUA) has reg-



Protest against the Escobal Mine (Photo: mundo.org)

istered 328 aggressions against defenders so far in 2013. Tragically, these acts rarely result in prosecution or even investigation, contributing to a dangerous environment of impunity.

In a recent statement, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission expressed “profound concern about this pattern of attacks against communities, their leaders and other human rights defenders.”

On the night of January 17, the main office of the Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences (AVANCSO) was broken into. This research center focuses on rural development, extractive industries, and historic memory. Unidentified persons sedated the security guard and then stole computers and important documents. The investigation by the authorities has not advanced.

On January 24, Daniel Pascual, leader of the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC), and two representatives of Peace Brigades International were attacked and threatened on the road to San Antonio Las Trojes, San Juan Sacatepéquez. They were visiting to investigate a conflict

generated by the construction of a well. Municipal authorities of San Juan Sacatepéquez accused Pascual and Peace Brigades of being destabilizing forces.

On February 25, Tomas Quej, leader of the community of Calihá, Alta Verapaz, left his community for Coban after receiving a telephone call in which he was told to appear before the Coban court. On February 28, he turned up dead from bullet wounds. Quej was a member of the People’s Council of Tezulutlán Manuel Tot, which works in defense of land rights. The case has not been solved.

On March 8, Carlos Antonio Hernández, union member and community leader, was assassinated by two men on a motorcycle. Days before the attack, he had received death threats in relation to his environmental activism in Camotán, Chiquimula. Hernández was also a member of the Camoteca Campesino Association, and the Executive Committee of the National Union of Guatemalan Health Workers

On March 15, Rubén Herrera, member of the Huehuetenango People’s Assembly for the Defense of Natural Resources (ADH) was detained. His detention occurred in the context of community opposition to a dam in Santa Cruz Barillas, Huehuetenango. The Public Prosecutor dismissed similar charges against 11 Barillas residents who were jailed for up to seven months before being released for lack of evidence.

The night of March 17, four Xinca leaders from Santa María Xalapán were kidnapped while returning from a referendum in San Rafael Las Flores. Two of those detained escaped and one was released, but Exaltación Marcos Ucelo, Secretary of the Xinca Parliament, was found dead the next morning. The referendum was the most recent step in a two-year fight to oppose the Escobal Mine. Nevertheless, on April 3, the Guatemalan government approved the Canadian company Tahoe Resources’ license to mine gold and silver, without having concluded the investigation of the acts of violence or waiting for judicial rulings on the complaints filed by people who will be af-

National Union of Guatemalan Health Workers March. Carlos Antonio Hernández was on the Executive Committee (Photo: Frontline Defenders)

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GHRC Calls on US, Mesoamerican Presidents to Reevaluate Security Policies

In an effort led by GHRC and coalition partners, over 150 international, regional and local organizations from 10 countries came together this April to address presidents from the US and Mesoamerica on the eve of their summit on May 4-5.

The human rights, immigrant rights and civil society organizations from across the region expressed concern about rising rates of violence and denounced “failed security policies that have militarized citizen security [...] and are directly contributing to increased human suffering in the region.” Examples from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and the United States demonstrate that militarization has weakened public institutions, has led to thousands of civilian deaths, and has done nothing to decrease transnational organized crime or make citizens safer.

Organizations also expressed concern about regional economic policies and stressed that “the imposition of large-scale extractive projects on marginalized

communities does not constitute ‘development’.” Instead, they write, it has resulted in further impoverishment, forced displacement, environmental destruction and an increase in government repression of social movements that oppose such projects. Finally, the letter links violence and harmful multinational development projects with forced migration and denounces criminalization of immigrants in the US.

Groups called on their governments to “make the protection of fundamental human rights – economic and social, civil and political – a focal point of this SICA gathering and future regional dialogues.”

In comments made during the trip, President Obama expressed openness to alternatives to militarization, yet made no



Guatemala trains guns on its own people. (Photo:mimundo.org)

reference to the human rights crisis. Nor has he proposed any concrete changes to regional policies that would refocus US funding. In fact, the President’s budget requests increased funds for problematic security programs in Central America.

Full text of letter available at www.ghrc-usa.org/resources/press-room/.

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fectured by the mine.

On April 8, Daniel Pedro, community leader from Santa Eulalia, was kidnapped in Santa Cruz Barillas. Pedro was also a member of ADH, and active in struggles against the hydroelectric dam in Barillas, as well as logging in Huehuetenango, which has displaced indigenous communities. His body was found on April 17.

On April 11, 26 community members were detained during a peaceful protest in San Rafael Las Flores, Cuilapa, Santa Rosa. They were protesting the approval of the license for the Escobal Mine. The protesters were on private property with permission from the owner yet security forces entered without a warrant. A number of men and women were injured by the tear gas used by the police during the arrests. On April 15, after giving their testimony, the charges against the 26 people were dropped and they were released.

On April 27, private security guarding the mine fired on protesters injuring 6.

Attacks on Land Rights Activists



Daniel Pedro Mateo, indigenous activist kidnapped April 7. (Photo: elquetzaliteco.com.gt)

Though the Interior Minister tried to justify the guard’s actions, the head of mine security was arrested while trying to leave the country.

On May 2, a state of siege was declared in four municipalities in the departments of Jalapa and Santa Rosa around the Escobal Mine. The move suspended several constitutional rights and placed the army in command. Thousands of soldiers and police were sent to the area, dozens

of houses were ransacked, and various people were arrested. Four of the arrested waited at least 18 days for their first hearing before a judge.

GHRC has called on authorities to do more to investigate cases of assassinations, threats, and attacks against human rights defenders and bring the perpetrators to justice. GHRC has also worked with a coalition of organizations to gather signatures calling for the release of Rubén Herrera and to deny the license for the Escobal Mine, and publically denounced the attacks on AVANCSO and Peace Brigades International. And GHRC continues to urge the United States to do more to protect human rights defenders.

As Guatemala begins to chip away at impunity for egregious human rights violations of the past, we must ensure that cycles of repression and violence do not repeat against current-day activists working to create a more just and inclusive society.

GHRC Hosts K'iche' Community Leader Lolita Chávez

Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic returned to her home in Santa Cruz del Quiché after a month-long tour of Canada and Washington, DC, where she spoke about her experience as a community leader working to defend the rights of the K'iche' people. Lolita served as spokesperson for the K'iche' People's Council (CPK) and has proven herself a fearless warrior of peaceful resistance to the many large-scale hydroelectric and mining projects in the region of El Quiché. GHRC organized the DC leg of Lolita's tour, which included public events at universities as well as meetings with several government offices.

Lolita and the CPK have organized a number of community referendums in which nearly 100% of 27,000 participants expressed their opposition to mining and hydroelectric projects in their territories. Over a million Guatemalans have participated in these referendums throughout the country and an overwhelming majority has rejected the projects. "Our movements are based on ancestral principles of



Lolita speaks at the Center for International Environmental Law.

but at what cost? Gold is killing us. This relationship is unjust; you can't generate gold by spilling blood."

The work of the CPK has implied serious security risks for Lolita and her colleagues, who have been the victims of vicious attacks, both verbal and physical. There exists an alarming impunity rate

she has been victim to attack. She spoke of an incident that occurred in July of 2012 when a group of armed men surrounded the bus that was carrying her home from a protest and attempted to lynch her. The men were unable to drag her from the bus, but severely beat four other women who were with her.

The frequency of attacks against members of the CPK has risen significantly over the past year. In 2010 there were four documented attacks against the CPK; in 2011 there were eight. Last year, that number jumped to 67.

Lolita attributes this dramatic increase to the presidency of Otto Pérez Molina. "We are being killed in the name of development and in the name of security," she said, "but we are not terrorists or drug traffickers."

Yet, she emphasized, they are responding to the new war waged against their land, territories and culture with peaceful actions. "While I am still alive, I will continue to speak out; I will not be silenced. I will continue saying no to remilitarization, no to repression."

**"While I am still alive, I will continue to speak out;
I will not be silenced."** —Lolita Chávez

equilibrium and reciprocity," she explained. "They are intergenerational, promote respect for Mother Nature and all living things."

The Guatemalan government, however, refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the referendums and continues to deny indigenous peoples' right to consultation.

Lolita identified the government as only one of a trio of power-holders -- including the country's oligarchy and the international business community -- that has worked to undermine and repress the movements of resistance to extractive industries and other megaprojects. They accuse community activists of being "trouble-makers, savages, and enemies of development who scare away tourism."

Companies take advantage of impunity to take over indigenous lands, she explained, and investors often have no idea where their money goes. "Their investments bring them development, food, wellbeing, clean and orderly societies...

for the perpetrators of these attacks and a simultaneous criminalization of the human rights defenders themselves. Many have been charged with baseless --but very serious--criminal offenses. As the public face of the Council for the last two years, Lolita has been a primary target and has been named in 22 legal complaints; the local police have also labeled her a threat to national security and the Constitution -- essentially classifying her as a terrorist.

One of the most emotional and poignant moments in Lolita's presentations was when she told the story of a fellow CPK leader, José Tavico Tzunun, who was murdered in his home on June 12, 2012. He had received death threats, but did not go to the police because he had no faith in the justice system.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted Lolita precautionary measures that provide her with a bodyguard. But, even with increased security,

Lolita's decision to fight for her community's rights in spite of ongoing risks speaks to her incredible courage, selflessness and conviction. And in the end, Lolita's message is one of peace and justice. She wants nothing more for her community than the basic rights of consultation, self-determination, and something the Mayan K'iche' call 'Utz Kaslemal', the right to live a full and harmonious life.



Lolita at Busboys and Poets with interpretation to American Sign Language (Photo: Manuel Leon)

Organizations Denounce Violations At Commission Hearings

In the March session of hearings of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Guatemalan organizations denounced threats to judicial independence, lack of reparations to victims of the internal conflict, and attacks on freedom of expression and community radio stations.

The IACHR, along with the Inter-American Court, is part of the Organization of American States (OAS). The Commission was created in 1959 with the mission to promote and protect human rights in the American hemisphere and is headquartered in Washington, DC.

Human rights organizations stressed concerns about militarization, criminalization of social movements and a lack of productive dialogue. They noted that the government has not fulfilled its international legal obligations including the implementation of Precautionary Measures and Inter-American Court sentences.

Threats to Judicial Independence

The issue of judicial independence was raised at an important time, as the genocide trial was about to begin. The petitioners, which included Lawyers Without Borders Canada, the Human Rights Law Firm and CALDH, highlighted advances in the judiciary but stressed that State policies and public declarations continued to promote impunity and were an affront to the dignity of victims in the country. They also denounced a series of threats and defamation in the press that put judges at risk.

In its response, the Guatemalan government mentioned that it receives dozens of complaints each year of threats against members of the judiciary. In recent years, it had provided protection to 40 prosecutors and received requests for protection for over 50 judges. Taking advantage of the moment, the government reiterated to the Commission that there had been “no genocide in Guatemala.”

Commissioner Felipe Gonzalez reminded the government that public statements affect the rule of law and democracy of the nation. President José Orozco added: “There should be a zero tolerance policy to threats against justice operators.”

Criminalization of Community Radio
Radio is often the primary source of news and information for rural communities, and sometimes the only medium that provides news in local languages. A group of Mayan associations that promote freedom of expression for indigenous peoples expressed concern to the Commission about ongoing criminalization of community radio stations.

Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Catalina Botero, directed a strongly worded statement to the government. “This is an issue we have dealt with for ten years,” she said, reminding them that the State has not recognized legitimate community radio, and instead equates it with illegal stations operating

rights [and] it is the obligation of the states to guarantee effective compliance with national, regional and international human rights laws,” she said. She emphasized the importance of strong and flexible mechanisms to ensure victims’ access to justice, including the granting of urgent Precautionary Measures.

Opportunities for civil society input, however, were very limited throughout the multi-year reform process, and prohibitive for most “users” of the system. Ultimately, none of the recommendations from civil society were incorporated into the final reforms. Governments succeeded in complicating the procedures for requesting and implementing precautionary measures and petitions, creating in-



Protest in support of community radio outside of the Guatemalan Congress (Photo: Cultural Survival)

without a license. “You must develop a framework to recognize community radio; [...] disproportionate criminal action against these stations is not appropriate.”

Reforms Weaken IACHR

As human rights violations are on the rise in Guatemala, victims are looking to the IACHR to help hold their government accountable. However, recent reforms, adopted a week after the hearings, have weakened the protections the Commission is able to offer.

In December 2012, GHRC’s Kelsey Alford-Jones addressed the OAS Permanent Council. “The Inter-American System is fundamental to the protection of our

created bureaucracy on an already strained system. The reforms raise the bar for victims and petitioners, while ceding more space and power to governments to oppose protective measures.

In a press conference before the March General Assembly of the OAS, a group of human rights organizations from across the Americas reiterated their support for the Inter-American System. “The reforms have not achieved a true strengthening of the System,” they stated, highlighting insufficient funding and the lack of improved access for victims. They will take effect in August 2013.

Justice for My Sister Collective Reaches Youth in US and Guatemala

By Voiceless Speak Recipient Heidy Rodríguez

It is funny the way life works in a cyclical manner. We always go back to where we started in one form or another. At 23, I traveled from my home in the United States to Guatemala, reversing the journey my parents had made at the very same age. They had left war-stricken Guatemala for the US in the 1980s.

I was advised not to travel alone, and while in Guatemala, I lived in constant fear for my safety in a land where misogyny is the norm. Unfortunately, my fear was not unfounded, and while walking down the street in Quetzaltenango, I was assaulted. I knew then that I had to break the silence that kept Guatemala's misogyny in the shadows and help others in the community do the same.

I am a peaceful warrior and support causes that will never allow any woman, regardless of legal status, to face injustice and fear. This is why I was inspired to join the Justice for My Sister Collective after attending a community film screening of the award-winning documentary *Justice for My Sister*.

The film is a David-versus-Goliath story about Rebeca, whose sister Adela was brutally murdered by her ex-boyfriend Ricardo. Rebeca is a single mother of five who makes tortillas to survive. Despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles, she is determined to see that Adela's killer is held accountable, and has led an effort to push for an investigation of the murder.

The story hit especially close to home as it takes place in my father's hometown of Escuintla. Watching it was like walking through Escuintla myself, and it reminded me of my own community's survivors-turned-warriors who have peacefully combated violence against women.

Formed in November, 2011, the Collective began as an outreach campaign surrounding the film and works to form young leaders in Guatemala who can, in turn, offer violence prevention workshops to thousands more. In the US, the Collective educates immigrant women about healthy relationships through workshops, seminars, community events, and film screenings. It aims to end the silence and break the cycle that has long reigned in our patriarchal culture and trickles down to our families. I serve as one of the community coordinators in the Collective, and organize community events, pitch ideas, and maintain communication with special speakers.

Over the last year and a half, the film and our violence prevention campaign have traveled to over 150 communities in Guatemala, in addition to nine other countries, numerous college campuses in the US, several high schools, and many community spaces in Los Angeles. In June 2012, our Los Angeles chapter held its inaugural retreat and training.

As a collective, our first step was to develop our own leadership skills, including public speaking and community organizing. We hold violence prevention workshops, screenings, and panel discussions to raise awareness about gender-based violence and to connect our audiences to service providers. We also distribute pledge cards to encourage audience members to take concrete action to prevent gender-based violence.

The response from the Guatemalan community in Los Angeles has been overwhelming. We have initiated a collective process of healing across generations, legal status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. One of our initiatives is an ongoing series of community forums where we create space for community members to discuss how we can better create healthy



Heidy gives the welcome address for a screening of the documentary (Photo: Polvo de Luz)

relationships in progressive spaces and social movements.

I have the best of both worlds. My beautiful Guatemalan heritage mixed with my American upbringing gives me a better understanding of the world and my role in it. My work with the Collective is an homage to all the women in Guatemala and around the world.

In June 2013, the Justice for My Sister Collective will launch a guest lecture series on healthy relationships, economic independence, and violence prevention geared towards undocumented women between the ages of 20 and 40.

If your organization is interested in hosting a screening of JUSTICE FOR MY SISTER, please contact Community Outreach Coordinator Heidy Rodríguez at heidyrod10@gmail.com.

A trailer for the film can be found at www.justiceformysister.com.

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. We are looking for translators (must be fluent in Spanish), helpers for large mailings, and passionate activists who would like to help educate or fundraise in their own community.

Human Rights *UPDATE*

MILITARIZATION

Feb. 3: **Military increasing role in citizen security.** President Pérez Molina ordered the Defense Ministry to develop a plan to increase military involvement in both citizen and border security.

Feb. 15: **Guatemalan Defense Ministry announces US donation of 42 armored vehicles for new military base in Tecun Uman.** The vehicles, along with other training and support, is part of ongoing US collaboration with Guatemalan armed forces to combat organized crime.

Feb. 15: **Reduced charges for soldiers and colonel in Totonicapán massacre.** Colonel Chiroy will be charged with breach of duty, while eight of his soldiers will be charged with breach of duty and “murder in a state of a violent emotion,” for the killing of six protesters in Totonicapán in October 2012. Judge Carol Patricia Flores determined that the soldiers fired in self-defense, and thus should not be charged with extrajudicial execution.

Apr. 7: **New military base in Ciudad Quetzal.** President Pérez Molina announced the installation of a new military base in the suburb of Guatemala City in order to quell rising levels of violence. The installation, he claimed, is a response to the community's requests for heightened security. Pérez Molina also announced heightened security in 25 municipalities at high risk for violence.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Feb. 19: **Guatemala Signs the UN Women's Initiative to end violence against women.**

Feb. 23: **Creation of a Ministry for Women sought.** Representatives from 15 social organizations visited Congress to ask that public policies supporting women's rights not be forgotten and that a Ministry for Women be created.

Feb. 27: **Alba Trejo, the Commissioner Against Femicide resigns due to intimidation and threats.** Trejo, appointed in 2010, was the first to hold the position.

ACCESS TO LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Jan. 8: **Security guards at Marlin mine shoot at workers.** Guards at the mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, San Marcos shot at and wounded nine mine workers who were protesting for employment benefits. Previously, their employer, the mining company Montana Exploradora, had been coercing its workers to sign employment contracts that did not allow them to receive any benefits for their work in the mine.

Jan. 28: **Community denounces violence and intimidation by cement company.** The community of San Antonio las Trojes I

in San Juan Sacatepéquez has opposed the construction of a cement factory by Cementos Progreso since 2006. In late January, residents voiced concern over a project to build a well when company workers arrived with heavy machinery. Over 5,000 people protested for several days against the violence and intimidation.

Apr. 22: **Polochic families and supporters gather outside presidential palace.** About 500 campesinos and community leaders gathered outside the presidential palace to demand that the Guatemalan government comply with its promise to provide land for the 769 families that were violently evicted from the Polochic Valley in 2011. Several weeks before, the group requested a meeting with the president so that they could hand over a petition with more than 100,000 signatures. President Pérez Molina did not meet with them due to “scheduling problems.”

Jan.-May: **Ongoing conflict and violence at San Rafael mine.** In January, a violent attack on the Escobal Mine took place sometime in the night killing 3 people and injuring 7. On Apr. 11, peaceful protests were broken up with arrests and on Apr. 27, mining security guards fired on protestors. A state of siege was declared on May 2 and further arrests were made.

IMPUNITY & CRIMINALIZATION

Feb. 21: **Bishop Gerardi's killer arrested re-entering prison.** After reportedly being allowed to enter and leave prison at will, Byron Lima Oliva was detained while returning to prison and charged with misconduct. His guards at the prison were also detained, and the prison director was fired. Since he was found guilty of the 1998 murder of Bishop Juan José Gerardi, Byron Lima has enjoyed immense power within the prison system.

Feb. 22: **Human Rights Ombudsman calls for investigation of 4 judges.** Human Rights Ombudsman, Jorge de León Duque, requested the investigation of four judges involved in the case of nine who were captured in Santa Cruz Barillas last May. de León Duque claims that the rights of the arrested were violated

TRUTH, JUSTICE & HISTORICAL MEMORY

Feb. 28: **Constitutional Court upholds closure of case Efraín Bámaca.** The Court confirmed the closure of the criminal case against President Pérez Molina for the forced disappearance of Efraín Bámaca. In March 2011, Bámaca's widow, Jennifer Harbury, brought a criminal complaint against then presidential candidate for his role in her husband's disappearance and death. Her complaint followed the Inter-American Court's 2010 order for the Guatemalan government to re-open the investigation.

Mar. 26: **Former Military Commissioner sentenced to 50 years for crimes against humanity and forced disappearances.** Isidro Cardona Osorio has been sentenced to 50.5 years in jail for committing crimes against humanity and forced disappearances related to the disappearance of student Edgar Leonel Paredes in 1982.



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El Quetzal

Human Rights News and Updates

- ⇒ **Historic genocide trial; Ríos Montt conviction annulled**
- ⇒ **Ongoing attacks against land rights activists**

Visit Guatemala this summer with GHRC. Meet amazing activists and learn about women's struggles around the country.

Join our Delegation August 3-11, 2013

**“Women in Resistance: Seeking Justice for Genocide and
Defending our Lands”**

Information at www.ghrc-usa.org