

Rights Action

www.rightsaction.org • June 2008

Travelling Afar, So Close to Home

In May, I (Grahame Russell) had the privilege of leading a delegation of students from the UNBC (University of Northern British Columbia) on an educational trip in Guatemala. We visited with extraordinary people and communities who are fighting huge odds — including repression — to build a better life for their children and communities.

On this trip, students learned about the two main aspects of Rights Action's work:

- ▶ funding and supporting community-based development, environment and human rights organizations carrying out their own projects;
- ▶ educating about, and being involved in activism related to global development, environmental and human rights struggles.

In 2007, Rights Action channeled over **\$860,000** of your donations and grants to our partner groups carrying out their projects. In 2008, to date: **over \$400,000**.

On this trip, and other such delegations, North Americans learn firsthand that many of the underlying problems in Guatemala — poverty, environmental destruction, repression — are linked to American and Canadian

economic interests and policies in Central America. As we travel from community to community, we discuss with Guatemalans and amongst ourselves what education and activist work we can engage in to change policies and practices in the 'global north' so as to put an end to exploitative and unjust north-south economic relations.

ITINERARY

*An asterisk * indicates a project or organization funded by Rights Action.*

Monday May 5 — Guatemala City FAFG (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team)*.

Since 1992, the FAFG has carried out exhumations across Guatemala, digging up the remains of victims of the State terrorism and genocide, determining — when possible — cause of death and identity. Every exhumation initiates criminal proceedings to determine cause of death and who committed the crime.

Magali Rey Rosa, a journalist and environmental/development activist. She worked for years with Madre Selva (www.madreselva.com), and is the founder of SABIA — Forum for Ecological Thinking.

Tuesday May 6 — Guatemala City to El Estor

Drove 3 hours to the Indigenous-Xinca Community of Jutiapa where we met with community representatives (from the departments of Jutiapa, Japala and Santa Rosa) whose communities, rivers and lives may soon be negatively affected by large-scale mining, including Goldcorp Inc.'s

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Make checks payable to "Rights Action" and mail to our US office.

For donations of stock, contact:

Grahame Russell at info@rightsaction.org

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THREATS AGAINST MEMBERS OF FAFG

Since the 1990s, Rights Action has funded and supported the exhumation process in campesino and Indigenous communities throughout Guatemala as well as the work of the FAFG.

In May, Rights Action took two educational delegations to meet with the FAFG in Guatemala City, including Fredy Peccerelli and Omar Bertoni Girón.

(May 25, 2008) The FAFG writes:

Further death threats to Fredy Peccerelli, his family and the members of the Guatemalan Foundation of Forensic Anthropology (FAFG). Following the death threat received on Monday, 19th May 2008, Fredy Peccerelli, Executive Director of the Guatemalan Foundation of Forensic Anthropology (FAFG), and Omar Bertoni Girón, Director of the FAFG's Laboratory of Forensic Anthropology and married to Bianka Peccerelli, Fredy Peccerelli's sister, received an email on the afternoon of Thursday, 22nd May 2008, with the following text:

"Greetings you bastards, how good Bianca looks in pink driving a Jeep along the Avenida Petapa, the first parcel with her parts will be arriving, we hope you've said good-bye, your security isn't worth shit. We haven't seen your family recently, the next one is Yani. We scared you, you bastards, this time you'll respect us. Die revolutionaries, take back the charges. FAFG IN MOURNING until we finish with you all."

The e-mail was sent from the same e-mail address as the previous threat, yax.pedro@yahoo.com, registered under the name of Pedro Yax.

For more info: Silke Gatermann, Assistant to the Director, cell [Guatemala]: (502) 5917 5772; silke.gatermann@fafg.org.

new Cerro Blanco mine.* *Rights Action is supporting a series of popular educational meetings on the environmental, health and development impacts of mining.*

Drove 5 hours to El Estor (department of Izabal), where we met with Father Dan Vogt (an American priest in Izabal since 1987 and co-founder of AEPDI — Association for the Integral Development of El Estor). AEPDI works with Mayan-Q'eqchi' communities on a range of development, environmental and Indigenous rights issues, including resisting the multiple harms caused by nickel mining in the region.* *RA works with AEPDI on a range of land-titling initiatives.*

Wednesday May 7 — El Estor

Traveled 1 hour in a 4-wheel drive pickup truck to visit "Lote 9", an isolated Mayan-Q'eqchi' community that has been resisting illegal incursions onto their lands by Skye Resources, a Canadian nickel mining company. The Lote 9 inhabitants are the offspring of a community that lost its land to the Canadian INCO nickel company 25 years ago.* *RA provides small general support grants to the community.*

Visited the Mayan-Q'eqchi' community of Barrio Revolución that, since late 2006, has been illegally and forcibly evicted and burned out 3 times in the interests of Skye Resources' nickel mining.* *RA provides small general support grants to the community.*



EL ESTOR EVICTIONS

At www.rightsaction.org, see this 9 minute documentary video about the January 2007 forced evictions of Mayan-Q'eqchi' communities, in the department of Izabal (eastern Guatemala), to make way for the nickel mining interests of Skye Resources, a Canadian mining company.

Thursday May 8 — El Estor to Rabinal

Travel 7 hours to Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.* *Since 1994, RA has funded and supported a wide range of projects, some of which our group visited.* The United Nations Truth Commission (1999) concluded that Rabinal was one of the Mayan regions where the U.S. and Western-backed Guatemalan military regime planned and carried out genocide against the local Mayan population.

Friday May 9 — Rabinal

All day visits in the town of Rabinal (department of Baja Verapaz): to mass grave sites where the remains of massacre victims have been exhumed by the FAFG in conjunction with local massacre survivor groups; to a series of large monuments in the Rabinal cemetery that commemorate the lives of massacre and genocide victims, where the massacre victims have been reburied with Mayan and Christian ceremonies; to the Rabinal Community Museum, founded and operated by surviving family of the victims, that is part "holocaust" museum



MAY10TH: We arrive by small boat across the Chixoy River dam basin to the Mayan-Achi village of Rio Negro. Deep under the water is the original Rio Negro community that suffered 4 massacres in 1982 (over 440 villagers killed) due to their opposition to being forcibly relocated to make way for the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank hydroelectric project. 22 Achi villages were forcibly evicted and/or inundated to make way for this "development" project. © Rights Action

Popular Consultations

On April 30th, I had the privilege of leading a previous activist-delegation to this Goldcorp mining affected region. We were honored to be present in the Municipal Gym of San Miguel Ixtahuacan (SMI), when the Indigenous leaders of SMI took the courageous decision to hold a legally binding consultation as to whether they want this type of large scale mining in their territory, or not, or under what conditions.*

Since 2005, RA has funded and supported numerous, legally binding consultations concerning mining, dams and other large-scale "development" projects in Guatemala.

Javier spoke about the history of the Mayan-Mam people of SMI, their indigenous vision of "development" and Mother Earth, and of the extensive environmental harms and human rights violations being caused by Goldcorp Inc's open-pit, cyanide-leaching gold mine.



As a 16 year-old boy, Sebastian Iboy Osorio lost his whole family in the March 13, 1982 massacre. Now, the father of 9 children, Sebastian is one of 16 families living in Rio Negro. Sebastian is in charge of the Rio Negro Historic Education Center. © Rights Action

(rescuing the names and lives of the victims of the genocide) and part cultural museum (rescuing the history and culture of the Mayan-Achi people); to the Foundation New Hope school that prioritizes providing bi-lingual (Spanish-Achi), multi-cultural education for poor, Mayan-Achi children — most of whose families were victims of the massacres and genocide.

In the evening, we met with Fernando Suazo, a former Dominican Catholic priest. Fernando arrived in Rabinal in 1984, just after the worst years of genocide. Fluent in Achi since 1984, Fernando came to be trusted by the Achi people that survived the genocide. Since 1984, and then 1994 when he left the church and married into an Achi community, Fernando has worked on a wide range of human rights issues in Rabinal and throughout Guatemala — including work with Bishop Gerardi (assassinated in April 1998) and the Catholic Church's REHMI (Recovery of the Historical Memory) project.

Saturday May 10 — Rabinal to Rio Negro

Drove 3 hours by van to the Chixoy Hydro-electric dam wall, at the now disappeared village of Pueblo Viejo. Then, a 45 minute boat ride, over the flood basin of the Chixoy dam, to the Mayan-Achi village of Rio Negro.* *Since the initial Rio Negro exhumation in 1993, RA has supported a number of projects in Rio Negro.*

In 1982, Rio Negro suffered 4 massacres and the killing of 440 of its villagers, in large part because they opposed being forcibly and illegally displaced by the construction of the Chixoy hydro-electric dam, a US\$350,000,000 "development" project of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank in conjunction with the military regime of Guatemala.* *RA is supporting ongoing efforts to get compensation and reparations from the WB and IDB.*

In Rio Negro, we met with Sebastian Iboy Osorio and other villagers — survivors of the four 1982 massacres.



MAY 20: In Toronto (Canada), Rights Action helped organize a protest at Goldcorp Inc's Annual General Meeting. With protesters in the street, leaders from Goldcorp-affected communities in Honduras and Guatemala, and others, went inside the Shareholder's meeting to tell investors about the environmental and health harms, and other human rights violations, being caused by their mining. ©Natalie Lowrey.

Sunday May 11 — Rio Negro to Guatemala City

In the early morning, we hiked 2.5 hours with Sebastian Iboy Osorio up a mountain to the site of the March 13, 1982 massacre of 70 women and 107 children.

Monday May 12 — Guatemala City to San Marcos

Drove 7 hours to the Mayan Mam municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacan (SMI), San Marcos. We had an evening visit with Javier de Leon, of ADISMI (Association for the Integral Development of San Miguel Ixtahuacan).* Javier spoke about the history of the Mayan-Mam people of SMI, their indigenous vision of "development" and Mother Earth, and of the extensive environmental harms and human rights violations being caused by Goldcorp Inc's open-pit, cyanide-leaching gold mine.

Tuesday May 13 — San Miguel Ixtahuacan to Comitancillo

The group had a Goldcorp Inc. company-hosted mine site visit; then the group visited with people whose lives and communities have been negatively impacted or outright destroyed due to the mining operation. Amongst other people, we met with a 74-year-old Mayan-Mam woman whose body was covered by skin rashes due to air and water contamination caused by the gold mine; a young mother brought us her 6-month-old infant, his entire body covered by the same rash.

In the afternoon, we drove 3 hours (windy, mountainous roads) to Comitancillo, a Mayan-Mam community resisting the entry of the Goldcorp Inc. mining company into their territory.

INVESTING IN CONFLICT

Public Money, Private Gain — Goldcorp Inc. in the Americas

Rights Action is pleased to announce the publication of "Investing in Conflict". Written by Dawn Paley (dawnpaley@gmail.com), with Mining Watch (www.miningwatch.ca) and Rights Action, and edited by Sakura Saunders, Investing in Conflict is about the "nexus of mining companies, the mainstream media, the Canadian government, International Finance Institutions and bought off NGOs" that are working "hard to keep the reality of large-scale, open pit mines out of picture, keep[ing] community resistance marginalized, and no matter what, to keep talking about "development"."

Focusing on the Goldcorp Inc. mining company, Investing in Conflict brings "hard facts and community perspectives together to help North Americans become more informed about the nature of the mining industry."

FREE COPY: Go to www.rightsaction.org and read the report on line, or print your own copy. Feel free to print and distribute copies to family and friends, investors and politicians. Copies in print available from Rights Action: **info@rightsaction.org**.

Wednesday May 14 — Comitancillo to Antigua

At a breakfast meeting in the local church with a Catholic priest working in Comitancillo since 2003, Father Elio spoke of the community consultation process, from 2004-2005, that firmly rejected mining in their region.

Then we participated in a public march and ceremony in Comitancillo — when municipal leaders and other community leaders re-affirmed the municipality's 2005 democratic and public decision to prohibit mining in their region. This is a very conflictive situation given that Goldcorp Inc. — with the full and illegitimate support of Guatemala's economic and political elites — has been illegally given yet another license to expand their open pit, cyanide-leaching mining into Comitancillo.

Then we drove 6 hours to Antigua. There, we had a wrap-up session to address: pending questions about what was learned on the trip; personal reflections about the issues we had the privilege of bearing witness to; what one can and ought to do upon returning to North America (given that many of the problems suffered in a place called "Guatemala" can trace their origins north to political, economic — consumer and investor — and military decisions made in the USA and Canada).

EDUCATIONAL-ACTIVIST DELEGATIONS

To form your own group to come on such a trip, or to join a RA delegation, contact Grahame Russell: **info@rightsaction.org**

COMMENTARY

The Banality of Billionaires, Poverty and Extreme Inequality

By Grahame Russell, April 7, 2008

In the "Ideas" section of the *Sunday Toronto Star* (April 6, 2008), under the column "10 Things We Learned This Week", one reads:

"3) One Canadian made Forbes magazine's list of top 100 billionaires: David Thomson and family in 31st spot (\$18.9 billion U.S.). (Forbes.com)"

"4) Nearly 3 billion people live on less than \$2/ day. (globalissues.org)."

Often, in the media, one reads these casual references to unfathomable and grotesque amounts of both wealth accumulation and poverty distribution. What are some of the "Ideas" represented in this listing of the Thomson family's billions of dollars juxtaposed with billions of people subsisting on less than \$730 / year?

While individualizing and implicitly honoring the Thomson family for their wealth, this list simultaneously de-individualizes and makes invisible the lives (and usually brutal early deaths) of billions of people and their \$2/day. A most harmful idea — implicit, not stated in this list — is that there is no link between wealth accumulation at the top of the global development pyramid scheme and the accumulation of poverty, exploitation and dispossession for billions of people at the bottom.

Yet, in our complexly intertwined and interdependent global community, if billionaires and millionaires "earn and deserve" their vast and unnecessary amounts of wealth (privilege and power) it stands that the 3 billion at the bottom of the ladder earn and deserve their lives of subsistence and early death on \$2/day.

The casually presented figures and numbers are not only horrific and numbing, they are misleading. Billions of people do not "live on" \$2/ day; they subsist in conditions of extreme exploitation and/ or abandonment, before dying young in usually terrible life conditions.

Such a blasé reproduction of mind-numbing figures trivializes the suffering and exploitation of billions of people living in poverty on our planet. It is a disservice to people and organizations clamoring across the world for an honest debate (presenting real "Ideas") about the grotesque inequality and injustice of our global economic order that creates billionaires to be honored in the Forbes list and media, while at the same time creating billions of people subsisting and dying young after invisibilized, nameless lives.

MEMORIAL DAY/REMEMBRANCE DAY

MAY 26, 2008

Today, we light a candle for all the victims and all their family members and loved ones, of all the wars and political conflicts. It remains one of our major commitments to end wars and other acts of political aggression and domination.

*Another world is possible and necessary. No more us and them. Thank-you.
Gracias a la vida.*

WHAT TO DO

Educational Delegation – Honduras, July 7-12

Rights Action is leading an educational delegation to Honduras to learn about community-based resistance to the environmental and economic harms and human rights violations caused by Goldcorp Inc's open pit, cyanide-leaching mine; and, to learn about the territorial and human rights struggles of Indigenous/Garifuna peoples: info@rightsaction.org.

2nd Hemispheric Gathering Against Militarization – Honduras, October 3-5

!Para callar las armas, hablemos los pueblos! (To quiet weapons, the people must speak!) Form your own group and/ or join a Rights Action delegation to come to this Gathering in La Esperanza, Intibucá, Honduras. For more information: www.antimilitarizacion.blogspot.com, antimilitarizacion@gmail.com or info@rightsaction.org.

3rd Social Forum Of The Americas – Guatemala, October 7-12

Form your own group and/ or join a Rights Action delegation to come to this Forum. Thousands of people from across the Americas are expected at this gathering to debate and discuss (and enjoy awesome music, art and theater) how Another World Is Possible ... And Necessary: info@rightsaction.org.

JOIN: Rights Action's listserv and newsletter lists.

CREATE YOUR OWN E-MAIL LIST: and re-distribute this and other information.

LISTEN: to www.democracynow.org news program every day.

READ: Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*; Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*; and Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

SMILE: And live to make another world possible, everyday.

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