

Rights Action

www.rightsaction.org • September 2005

THE "DEVELOPMENT" DEBATE

Dear friends,

Greetings. Thank-you for your on-going financial support for our community-controlled development, enviro-protection and human rights work. We hope this newsletter contributes to the much needed "development" debate.

Firstly, we re-produce a "commentary" that aired on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio program. The ensuing pieces—about the Garifuna people in Honduras threatened by the global tourist industry, and about World Bank funding for a gold mine threatening Mayan communities in Guatemala—address very harmful issues taking place in the context of the unjust global "development" economic order.

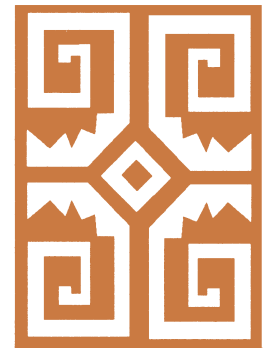
As with most aspects of our work, we ask for your financial support for the development, enviro- and HR projects of our partner groups in Guatemala and Honduras (as well as Chiapas and Haiti) and we encourage people to become more involved in efforts to change global "development" policies set in and implemented by the governments of the United States and Canada, by global institutions such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and by US-AID and Canada-CIDA.

HAITI'S SHOCKING REPRESSION: Ever since the February 2004 coup against the elected government of Haiti, the "interim" government—backed by Canada, the U.S., France and the United Nations—has carried out / or tolerated a brutal campaign of repression against opposition politicians, community development leaders and human rights activists, all the while allowing the worsening exploitation of and racism against Haiti's majority. Rights Action continues to request grants from funding institutions and donations from individual donors for our "Haiti Emergency Program."

Thanks for your trust in our work. Send your questions, comments and suggestions to Grahame: info@rightsaction.org.

Annie Bird and Grahame Russell

GOOD-BYE & MANY THANKS: It is with sadness and many fond memories that we say goodbye to Jane Pelly who has worked with us in Guatemala for over three years. Highly dedicated and experienced, Jane will be sorely missed, as she moves back to England with her family.



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

UNITED STATES

Rights Action
Box 50887
Washington, DC 20091-0887
202-783-1123
info@rightsaction.org

CANADA

Rights Action
Box 73527, 509 St. Clair Ave W.
Toronto ON, M6C-1C0
416-654-2074
info@rightsaction.org

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DEVELOPMENT DEBATE

CBC Commentary on the Live 8 Concerts

CBC INTRO: The Live 8 concerts are this Saturday but they won't do much to stop the growing poverty and AIDS crises in the poor countries of the world. Grahame Russell is a lawyer who works with Rights Action, a human rights organization in Toronto. On Commentary today, he says it's only when G8 countries admit they're part of the problem, that any solution can be hoped for. [Listen to or download from: <http://www.cbc.ca/commentary/>]

GRAHAME RUSSELL COMMENTARY: "Make poverty history" is once again a popular cry. But how long will it last? Until the "Live 8" concerts are over? Rock "stars", politicians and the media are again pitching the idea that "we are the world", that we care about the "have-nots", those billions of people who live and die on 1, 2 or 3 dollars a day.

It's easy to say 'Let's make poverty history', as we line up for free Live 8 tickets. But we can't end poverty if we don't understand its roots. Poverty is not a 'natural' state of affairs. Poverty—the greatest killer year-in, year-out in our global human community—is caused principally by exploitation and injustice on a local level, national level and global level. But we, in the north, in the G8 countries, regularly ignore our role.

Poverty and wealth are two sides of the same coin. The same economic and political systems that produce and distribute wealth, produce and distribute poverty. Poverty is not created in a vacuum, but in a global economic order with strongly enforced practices and rules related to control over property and resources, over the production and creation of wealth, and over the distribution of such wealth and of poverty. Poverty and powerlessness, like wealth and power, are created and distributed unfairly from the local to the global levels.

If the G8 nations deserve high standards of living and huge accumulations of economic wealth and military power, then by the same logic the poor nations deserve low standards of living and huge accumulations of poverty and powerlessness! If rock "stars" 'earn' and 'deserve' tens of millions of dollars / year, then billions of exploited and impoverished people across the same planet earn and deserve 1 to 3 dollars / day!

To really make poverty history, we should demand an end to the actions of global corporations that are mostly based in the G8 countries, corporations that exploit already impoverished workers in countries of the global south; corporations that often exploit the rich and natural resources of these countries, for our benefit in the global north.

We should demand an end to the actions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund whose "free trade" policies are set by the G8 countries, policies that have further opened the poor countries of the planet to control and exploitation by northern banks and companies, even as poverty and environmental destruction have worsened in the global south. And we should demand economic and development programs that are designed and controlled at the local level, based on local ownership of and control over their resources and production and distribution capacities.

If we, in the G8 countries, are not willing to look in the mirror and acknowledge that we are part of the problem of poverty, and that we need to change how we live and act on the planet, then little will come of this most recent clamouring to 'make poverty history', except for feel-good sentiments and great rock 'n' roll concerts in the rich and powerful countries of the planet.

HONDURAS

Tourist Development, Repression, and Garifuna Resistance

In August, Rights Action organized a fact-finding delegation to the north-shore region of Honduras to investigate how the global tourist industry was having very harmful impacts on the development, environment and human rights needs of the Garifuna people.

The tourist industry and repression on Honduras' Caribbean coast

Alfredo López was a political prisoner for seven years, jailed on fabricated charges because of work in defense of the communal lands of his Garifuna community, Triunfo de la Cruz. The struggle of Triunfo de la Cruz, located in the municipality of Tela, Atlántida, on Honduras' spectacular Caribbean coast, is in defense of their ancestral traditions, including communal land tenure and management.

As in all 46 Garifuna communities, Triunfo de la Cruz is threatened by various actors interested in the expansion of the tourist industry along the coast where the Garifuna people have lived for over 200 years.

Survivors of European imperialism

The Garifuna are an afro-descendent indigenous people whose origins lie on the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent, where shipwrecked slaves and maroons from neighbouring islands joined the indigenous Arawak population. As a result of their constant struggles against the British colonizers, the Garifuna were forcibly evicted from the island in 1797 and abandoned on Honduras' north coast. They have subsequently populated almost the entire coastline, maintaining their autonomy and living in harmony with the land, managing the natural resources according to their cosmovision.

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Garifuna Resistance

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The community of Triunfo de la Cruz continues to manage the resources communally and after decades of struggle achieved a communal land title in 1992 and an extension in 1996. These titles are inalienable, thus preventing their sale to outside investors.

Tourism versus indigenous rights

In recent years the Honduran government has become interested in the lands and beaches where the Garifuna communities are located, aiming to develop the tourist industry. Recent governments have adopted policies and projects to this end, without paying the least attention to the rights of the Garifuna people. These “reforms” and privatizations have been driven by international “development” institutions (World Bank, IADB—Inter-American Development Bank), facilitating the interests of outside investors who have coveted the Garifuna coast for decades.

In 1994, investors began constructing a luxury complex within the ancestral lands of Triunfo de la Cruz. To facilitate the “Mar Bella” (Beautiful Sea) project, the Municipal government of Tela improperly granted the investors land titles located inside Triunfo de la Cruz’s communal land title, a common though illegal practice in Garifuna communities.

Resistance and repression

The Lands Defense Committee of Triunfo de la Cruz (CODETT), led by Jesús Alvarez and Alfredo López, accused the Municipal government of Abuse of Authority and Embezzlement of Public Funds. For his actions in defense of his community’s lands, Jesús Alvarez was the target of two murder attempts and died a few days after the second. During the same period, Alfredo López was illegally detained on false charges of drug trafficking and remained in jail for seven years, despite the complete lack of evidence in the case.

In spite of the repression, the community managed to detain the Mar Bella project. Today, half-constructed villas stand as monuments to the victorious community struggle. One now sees cabins being constructed by a group of women from the community as an alternative, community-based tourism. At the same time, the women’s community project aims to recuperate their lands and ensure that the Mar Bella project does not advance in the future.

The cases of Jesús Alvarez and Alfredo López in Triunfo de la Cruz are not unique; they characterize the repression carried out against leaders both of Garifuna communities and of the Honduran Fraternal Black Organization (OFRANEH).

OFRANEH is a community-based organization that, since the 1970s, has accompanied the struggles of Garifuna communities and their survival as a people. OFRANEH’s main focus is the defense of ancestral territory and has been the only organization to consistently denounce policies and projects that aim to break up community titles. OFRANEH has struggled for the legal titling of ancestral territory still not recognized by the State. Many OFRANEH leaders have been targeted for persecution, from threats and intimidation to politically motivated murders and jailings.

On March 25, 2005, Miriam Miranda, one of OFRANEH’s principal leaders, was the victim of an illegal search in her house in the city of La Ceiba. Criminal investigation (DGIC) agents entered the house, accusing Miranda of possessing stolen weapons and jewelry supposedly stolen from a shop, the same kind of false accusations that cost Alfredo López seven years of his life. No contraband was obviously found and authorities, prompted by the international denunciation of the incident, said it was the result of an error of State intelligence.

On May 30, OFRANEH General Coordinator Gregoria Flores was shot in the arm with an exploding bullet, in broad daylight in La Ceiba. The aggressor, a private security agent, was

supposedly in pursuit of a thief, though there has not been an adequate investigation into the incident.

Development Decrees

The latest of the “development” policies and projects that pose threats is an executive decree establishing that Tela Bay, where Triunfo and other Garifuna communities are located, is an “Area Under Special Management” (ABRE). The decree’s objective is to zone and manage the area according to the government’s orientation to tourism, based on prior legislation that defines tourist zones as public property, giving the State the right to expropriate. Concerning Garifuna communal lands, ABRE will apply Chapter III of the 2004 Property Law that facilitates the fragmentation of communal titles, in clear violation of International Labor Organization Covenant 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

The World Bank is funding the Honduran Land Administration Program (PATH) in order to give “legal” control of ancestral Garifuna lands to the land invaders who have taken them over and, based on the Property Law, seeks to individualize existing communal land titles.

ABRE, the 2004 Property Law and PATH form a regulatory framework whose main goal along the Caribbean Coast is to ensure the legal security of land tenure in the hands of individuals, ie, national and international investors, and not in favour of communities.

Mega-“enclave” tourism

One example of the legislation changes and international support is the tourist mega-project “Los Micos Beach & Golf Resort”, known as the Tela Bay Project. Without taking into account the concerns of the communities that will be directly affected—San Juan, Tornabé and Miami—the Honduran Institute of Tourism and wealthy investors are moving ahead with the ‘enclave tourism’ project within the buffer zone of the Jeanette Kawas National Park, despite the fact that luxury hotels, a golf course and other aspects are not sustainable and threaten the communities’ resources, especially land and water.

Los Micos has had multi-million dollar support from the Italian Cooperation, the IADB and investors who have a long history of usurping ancestral Garifuna lands and threatening the communities and their resources.

OFRANEH has brought several petitions to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission for abuses and violations committed by the Municipality of Tela against Triunfo de la Cruz, by the State and international ‘conservationist’ institutions in the Cayos Cochinos and, in the case of Punta Piedra, for human rights violations linked to territorial rights violations. In the case of Alfredo López, the sentence of the Inter-American Court will soon be made known.

Garifuna communities continue their struggle in defense of their territory, natural resources and cultural survival. The repression has not been able to silence OFRANEH or its leaders. Here in Triunfo de la Cruz and all along the coast, the Garifuna people, accompanied by their ancestors, are struggling for territory, justice and to continue existing as a People.

They need support.

* * *

Since 1998, Rights Action has supported OFRANEH’s community development, enviro-protection and community rights work and asks for your further tax-deductible donations.



GUATEMALA

World Bank slammed over support for Canadian mining company in Guatemala

For over 3 years, Rights Action has funded and worked with rural, indigenous communities in Honduras and Guatemala who are negatively impacted by Glamis Gold mining operations. Their operations in Honduras continue, unabated, and harmfully. In Guatemala, there has been more coordinated and widespread opposition, even though Glamis Gold has been strongly supported by the Canadian and Guatemalan governments and the World Bank.

“World Bank Attacked Over Gold Mine”

(Financial Times, by Christopher Swann, Washington, 8/21/05)

“The World Bank has come under fire from one of its own internal watchdogs over its role in funding a gold mine project in Guatemala. The venture has been seen by some as a test case of the bank’s ability to handle successfully such projects following its rejection of a recommendation by an independent report to pull out of extractive industries.

“The confidential draft report, obtained by the FT, charges that the bank failed adequately to consult the local community or properly evaluate the environmental and humanitarian impact of the mine. Although only in draft form, the report is likely to be an embarrassment to the bank.

“Glamis Gold, the Canadian company constructing the mine, has said the venture has broad support from the indigenous Mayan Indians. But the project has been plagued by controversy. In January a 40-day protest by locals ended in bloodshed when security forces clashed with protesters, resulting in one death. On March 13 a villager was shot dead by an off-duty employee of Grupo Golan, a company providing security for Glamis. And in June a referendum in a nearby municipality showed 98 per cent opposed moving forward with the project.

“The draft report charges that the IFC—the private finance arm of the World Bank—failed to give sufficient time “to allow a reasonably informed consultation”. “The IFC should have considered more systematically the potential risk on human rights at the project level; should have taken appropriate measures to mitigate these risks.”

“Kevin McArthur, president and chief executive of Glamis Gold, said: “We have a signed document from the indigenous leadership early on in the project that they wanted to go ahead. We are convinced this will be good for the local community.””

What this says

Please note that this report was done by the WB itself, and concludes that the WB-funded company—Glamis Gold—did not properly consult with the affected Mayan communities. It reminds the reader that the WB continues to invest in “extractive industries”, even when recommended not to by its own experts. As claimed by community groups and NGOs, there is 98% local opposition to the Glamis Gold project, although Glamis Gold insists it has “broad support.” Given all this, it is not surprising that there as already been repression associated with the mining project, even as the actual mining has not begun.

* * *

Rights Action requests your tax-deductible donations for mining-affected communities in Honduras and Guatemala that are defending their community and environmental interests. At www.rightsaction.org, you will find a Rights Action report by Sandra Cuffe, on mining and “development” issues in Latin America, with a particular focus on Honduras and Guatemala.

HAITI

Shocking repression continues

Rights Action presents here an edited summary of a Preliminary Report by the IJDH (Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti), a courageous Haiti- and U.S.-based organization. Please go to www.ijdh.org to get more information.

August 20 football massacre

On August 20, an estimated 5,000 persons were at a church/school complex in the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Martissant, watching soccer matches, when police officers—accompanied by civilians armed with machetes—arrived. The police approached the Disc Jockey running the entertainment system and told him to tell everyone to lie down on the ground. Someone fired a shot in the air and . . . chaos ensued.

Police shot several individuals, including people trying to escape over the walls of the stadium. When the police stopped shooting, the armed civilians inspected the people lying on the ground, one by one. Some were allowed to go and others hacked with machetes by the civilians. The police and civilian attackers claimed they were looking for “gang members”.

Many were hacked to death with machetes or hacked and then shot by police. Police ambulances carried away the bodies. People reported to have been arrested were later found in the morgue by family members. Bodies were found in toilets in the stadium, on the basketball court, in corridors around the church, around the walls of the stadium, and where an electoral registration office is located. Some were suffocated in the stampede to leave the stadium. Estimates of deaths range between 20 and 50.

August 21 house raids

On Sunday, August 21, police trucks with officers in black and in camouflage uniforms and hoods arrived in Grande Ravine, accompanied by civilians with machetes. They went to the home of Arens Laguerre, a TV cameraman and pro-democracy activist who was illegally arrested in May 2004, and only released after protests by press freedom organizations. Mr. Laguerre was able to escape and witnessed subsequent events from a safe place. He and other witnesses in the area heard the police and civilians say “La se kay yon rat,” (“there is the house of a rat”). “Rat” is a derogatory term the police use to designate supporters of the Lavalas movement.

The attackers continued into the area of Ti Jasmin, where they burned four homes. The machete-wielding civilians, some of whom were recognized by witnesses as participants in the August 20 football massacre, went from home to home. Houses of suspected Lavalas supporters were ignited, and their occupants dragged outside. Some people were shot; others were hacked to death or severely wounded. At least 5 young men are believed to have been killed on the spot. Others were arrested by the police and then handed to civilians to be hacked with machetes. The police are said to have loaded persons into a black Toyota Land cruiser and removed from the scene.

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Please donate to Rights Action’s “Haiti Emergency Fund” used to support grassroots groups supporting besieged individuals and communities. (Emergency Fund proposal available: info@rightsaction.org)

GUATEMALA

New Report: *The Chixoy Dam Legacy*

Since 1994, Rights Action has been funding and working with innovative and courageous development, enviro- and HR projects in the Rabinal region of Guatemala, one region where the Guatemalan army carried out genocide. Working with local survivor organizations, and with your support, one issue we are working on is the Chixoy Dam Reparations Campaign.

During the worst years of Guatemala's repression and genocide, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded and implement the Chixoy hydroelectric dam project along the Chixoy River. More than 4,000 people were seriously harmed by this project, and 444 people were massacred after resisting forced resettlement.

We are please to announce the release of "The Chixoy Dam Legacy", a landmark study commissioned by the Coordinating Committee of Chixoy Dam-affected people (COCAHICH), Rights Action and the International Rivers Network (IRN). "The Chixoy Dam Legacy" is a 5 volume study that concludes that the development of the dam took place at the cost of land, life and livelihood; in violation of national and international law; and that the project caused extreme poverty in communities which formerly enjoyed a sustainable way of life.

This report will assist us with the on-going work of the Chixoy Dam Reparations Campaign to achieve justice for the harms, loss of life and suffering, based on full reparations made to the affected communities and survivors by the World Bank, the IDB and the Guatemalan government.

Thank-you for your on-going support for the work of this Campaign. For complete report, visit: www.irn.org. For more information: info@rightsaction.org.

RightsAction

Box 73527, 509 St. Clair Ave W.
Toronto ON, M6C-1C0



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