

# Rights Action

[www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org) • March 2006

## TO BE HOPEFUL IN BAD TIMES IS NOT FOOLISHLY ROMANTIC

Dear friends,

And the beat goes on. And our work for global equality, justice and environmental well-being goes on. Thank-you for your trust and on-going tax-charitable donations.

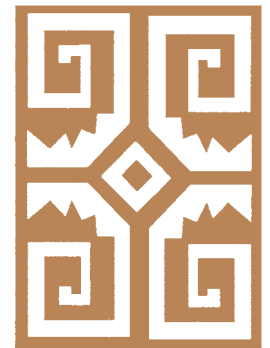
*To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.*

– Howard Zinn, “You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A personal history of our times”

We invite you to:

- Participate in delegations to Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti or El Salvador and see your funds at work, learning first hand about the work of our partner organizations.
- Form your own group of people—from your religious centre, learning institution, community organization—and come on an educational delegation.
- Form long-term partnerships with particular grassroots organizations or communities in Chiapas, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti and (now) El Salvador.

We are proud of the work detailed in this newsletter and are continually amazed at the courage and creativity of the people we are able to support—despite the huge injustices and inequalities they confront. Please contact us with your questions and suggestions.



### **TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS:**

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

### **UNITED STATES**

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Go to our website at [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org).  
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**EL SALVADOR**

**ANNOUNCING ... El Salvador Program**

We are pleased to announce Rights Action's El Salvador program. After several years of supporting a few Salvadoran community-based organizations, Rights Action will begin working in El Salvador in a more comprehensive manner. (Upon request, we can send you our general overview for the El Salvador Program)

We can do this by linking up with long time activist Matthew Eisen, a U.S. citizen now in his tenth year living and working in El Salvador. Matthew, with Temporary Salvadoran Residency, lives on a stipend funded by Our Lady of Victory Parish and Archdiocese of Cincinnati. To date, his main work has been with the inner city youth violence reduction program of Nueva Generación XXI Youth Movement, along with national and international networks educating about and working to remedy the underlying problems of poverty and exploitation, repression and impunity, enviro-destruction and discriminations.

The underlying problems of poverty and exploitation, impunity, repression and violence, racism, and enviro-destruction are similar in El Salvador as the other countries where we work. These are not "national" problems; a local to national to regional to global perspective is crucial in this work. Our work in El Salvador will reflect the work we do elsewhere:

- Channeling foundation grants and general support funds to community-based organizations working on the wide range of underlying problems.
- Enabling and promoting regional and north-south forums and exchanges to learn more about and work together to address the global nature of the underlying problems in the region.
- Planning and carrying out educational activities aimed at U.S. and Canadian citizens: speaking tours with Salvadoran community leaders; educational delegations to El Salvador; distribution of articles, urgent actions and communiqués.

*For more information about El Salvadoran history, economics, culture, politics, etc., contact Matthew Eisen who will send a list of web sites: [rightsaction.es@gmail.com](mailto:rightsaction.es@gmail.com)*



Mayan-Sipakapense women voting in referendum on mining.

## **GUATEMALA**

# **Indigenous and Community Resistance to Mining Industry in Guatemala and Honduras**

In Honduras and Guatemala, we continue funding the development and enviro-projects of Indigenous and grassroots organizations in communities whose environment, development and human rights are being harmed and violated by North American mining companies. The Canadian-U.S. Glamis Gold company has been a focal point of resistance, given the harms and violations resulting from its open pit, cyanide-leaching mines in Honduras and Guatemala.

### **Release of “Sipakapa No Se Vende**

Rights Action helped fund and is selling (\$20 + shipping) Spanish and English-subtitled copies of the “Sipakapa No Se Vende” documentary that provides a first-hand account of who are the Mayan peoples of western Guatemala, what are the harms and violations associated with the Glamis Gold mining operation, why they are resisting this “development” project, and what are their own visions of and aspirations for locally controlled development. (To purchase: 416-654-2074, info@rightsaction.org)

### **Speaking Tours in Canada**

Leading up to Glamis Gold’s Annual Shareholder meeting in Toronto, Canada, on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Rights Action has invited leaders from the Glamis Gold affected regions of Honduras and Guatemala, to come on educational speaking tours to discuss their visions and plans for locally controlled development and a healthy environment. (To host presentations in your community: 416-654-2074, info@rightsaction.org)

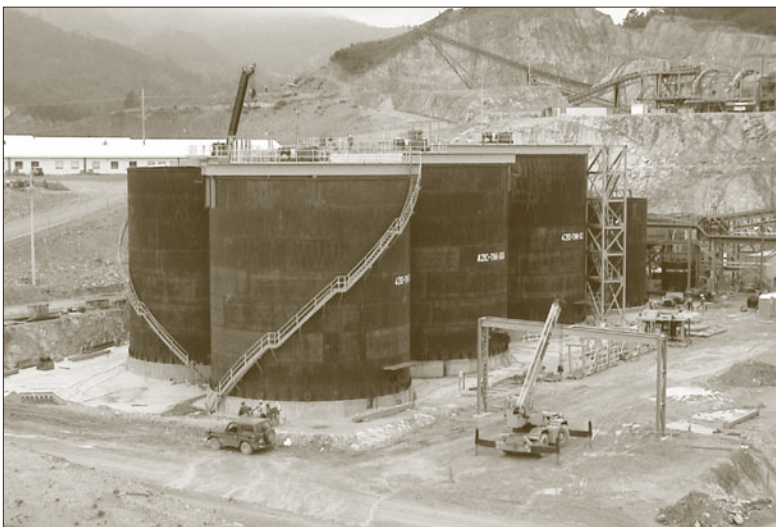
### **Educational Seminar-delegation**

See page 4, for information about our July 22-28 Seminar-Delegation to Guatemala.

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### **Background Information**

Go to [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org) and read Sandra Cuffe’s report: “A Backwards, Upside-Down Kind of Development: Global Actors, Mining and Community-Based Resistance in Honduras and Guatemala.” Upon request, we can email you numerous urgent actions and articles related to the Glamis Gold mining issue.



CARACOL PRODUCCIONES

Cyanide Containers at Glamis Gold mining site, Guatemala

# Seminar-Delegation to Guatemala

## JULY 22-28

Please join Rights Action's 2006 "Development, Enviro-, Human Rights Delegation-Seminar" in Guatemala, July 22-28. In these Delegation-Seminars, Rights Action takes a comprehensive historical and global approach to understanding the endemic poverty-exploitation, enviro-destruction, repression / foreign interventions, and racism of a place like Guatemala.

**FOR WHOM:** Concerned citizens and activists, donors, professors and educators, law students and teachers, who are concerned about exploitation-poverty-"development" / foreign interventions and repression / enviro-destruction / and about community-based resistance and work for equality, justice and enviro-well being.

**STUDY PLAN:** Through a series of city-based meetings with development, enviro- and HR activists and travel to rural areas to meet with and learn from community organizations where the negative impacts of the exploitation, racism and repression have been most felt, the Delegation-Seminar will focus on:

- **HISTORY:** In readings sent to delegates before the trip, and discussions on the first day, this Seminar-Delegation will provide an understanding of 500 years of Guatemalan history – including the past and on-going negative role played by the powerful, wealthy countries of the global north, a perspective necessary to understanding Guatemala's endemic poverty, racism, repression, impunity and lack of democracy today
- **PARTICULAR ISSUES:** efforts to seek justice and reparations for the U.S.- and western-backed genocide of the 1980s; efforts to seek justice and reparations for forced evictions and massacres related to the World Bank, Inter-american Development Bank funded "Chixoy Hydro-electric Dam project"; resistance to the "free trade" neo-liberal "development" model; community based and popular resistance to the harms and violations associated by the global mining industry, including the Glamis Gold open pit mining company;
- **RESISTANCE & GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS:** Despite the on-going repression – on top of exploitation and widespread enviro-destruction -, there are courageous and vibrant grassroots organizations organizing and fighting for a just development model, for democracy and the rule of law, for the environment and women's rights.

This Delegation-Seminar—led by Grahame Russell of Rights Action, in conjunction with key partner groups that Rights Action supports and works with in Guatemala—will enable participants to learn first-hand about community development, enviro- and HR struggles and organizing, and about how to be involved, in North America, with political, legal and quasi-legal activism and organizing in support of Guatemalan community-controlled development, enviro- and HR work.

**RISKS:** Rights Action will have an open discussion with participants about potential risks: on-going political issues; crime; health; etc. Participants will sign a waiver, accepting responsibility for what might happen during the Seminar.

**COSTS:** Cdn\$1,050 / US\$900. This includes 3 meals a day for 7 days; board for 8 nights/ in-country transportation / translation / guiding / honorariums for local community-based groups that participants visit with. Participants are responsible for arranging and paying for their travel to and from Haiti.

**CONTACT:** 416-654-2074, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org).

## HONDURAS

# Political Prisoners in Montaña Verde Continue Struggle for Freedom and Justice

By Sandra Cuffe, Rights Action, [caminando27@yahoo.es](mailto:caminando27@yahoo.es)

*“With the intention of transmitting a message of hope to all the compañeros in different communities, to indigenous peoples, to those of us struggling for justice, those of us who are always characterized by our work to defend the rights of the people, especially the right to our lands and all the resources our communities possess ...”*

These words, spoken by political prisoner Marcelino Miranda, reflect the unshakeable hope and courage that three years in jail have not been able to tarnish. January 9, 2006 marked three years since the violent and brutal police attack on the remote Lenca descendent community of Montaña Verde, in southwestern Honduras, when 30 police, special forces agents and armed civilians stormed the community at night, left bullets, tear gas and fear, and illegally arrested Marcelino and Leonardo Miranda and marched them to jail in the town of Gracias.

The Miranda brothers, both Indigenous Communal Council leaders and outspoken community organizers in the struggle for Montaña Verde’s communal land and resources, were tortured in the community, on the hike and ride down to Gracias and during the first months of their detention.

A major strategy for criminalization of indigenous resistance and grassroots activism in Honduras is the (un)justice system. While abuses by State agents—police, investigation



SANDRA CUFFE

L-R: Montaña Verde political prisoners, Leonardo Miranda, Luciano Pineda and Marcelino Miranda

agents, State prosecutors, judges—continue in a climate of complete impunity, fabricated criminal charges have been laid for years against the majority of the Montaña Verde Indigenous Communal Council members, falsely accused of crimes ranging from land usurpation (of the community’s own communal land) to murder.

“Brothers and sisters, we are here in this place, prisoners—not prisoners because we are criminals, but because we have raised the voice of justice, a voice for those who have none,” explains Marcelino Miranda.

The most serious (false) charge against six council members is murder, for which Marcelino and Leonardo Miranda have been sentenced to the maximum sentence of 25 years by the corrupt judicial authorities in Gracias. Their case is currently in the Supreme Court at the last stage of the appeal process, while the Miranda brothers continue to speak out with tremendous courage and commitment.

“Compañeros, while it is true that one suffers here, it is worse to be a slave for a lifetime. It is better, compañeros, to suffer for a short while and to liberate our peoples, our communities,” says Marcelino.

At the root of the repression and abuse of the legal system against the leaders of Montaña Verde is their struggle to defend the community’s communal land and rich natural resources from the powerful landowners that have attempted to take it over for decades. As a result of a powerful indigenous resistance movement in the mid-1990s led by the Civic Council of Grassroots and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) – organization with which Montaña Verde is affiliated – communal land titles were secured for many indigenous and afro-indigenous (Garifuna) communities, although in recent years there have been multiple attempts to undermine, fragment and privatize communal land by the State and international institutions such as the World Bank.

“We are struggling against the landowners, against the invaders of our communities,” asserts Marcelino. “In spirit, we are always with all communities that struggle. Our children and our future descendants will judge our actions. If we do not take action today, our future generations will feel regret.”

“I send a message of encouragement to all the peoples who hear us, both here in Honduras and elsewhere in the world: we have not lost hope. A better world is possible. Brothers and sisters, let’s struggle together with strength and courage.”

\* \* \*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, to get involved in work to free the Montaña Verde political prisoners and to support community development work in Montana Verde: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), 416-654 2074.

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## **GUATEMALA**

# **“A kind of justice” done for Guatemalan massacre survivors**

*Below, you will find an article explaining how the Guatemala government is beginning to release compensation and reparation funds to surviving members of the Plan de Sanchez community of Mayan-Achi people. There are a number of problems and manipulations with the government’s payment of these initial funds, that we won’t detail here.*

## GUATEMALA MASSACRE SURVIVORS PAID AFTER 24 YEARS

February 9, 2006, by Mica Rosenberg, Reuters

A kind of justice came to survivors of a massacre in Latin America's bloodiest 20th-century war when Guatemala began compensating villagers this week for killings 24 years ago. Residents of the remote mountain hamlet of Plan de Sanchez said the first government payments had begun showing up in bank accounts from a landmark \$8 million compensation package for the army-led slaughter of more than 200 people, mostly Mayan women and children.

On July 18, 1982, soldiers and allied militias [...] overran the hamlet, then raped and tortured villagers, herded them into a building and blew it up with hand grenades. It was one of the most infamous massacres by the army in a fight against leftist rebels. More than 200,000 people died in Guatemala's 36-year civil war, which ended in 1996. No one has been prosecuted for the Plan de Sanchez massacre and few have faced justice for other rights abuses during the war.

In a ruling last year, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica awarded 317 family members close to \$25,000 each to be paid by the Guatemalan government. It was the first award of its kind by the court. "In Guatemala, the attitude of the politicians was to deny the undeniable, excuse the inexcusable," said Frank La Rue, the presidential human rights secretary and former head of the rights organization that originally brought the case. "The attitude of the court was completely the opposite. We had to recognize the international responsibility of the state and ask for forgiveness from the victims."

Guatemala's human rights office opened bank accounts for the beneficiaries, who live mainly from subsistence farming. They will receive three installments of \$8,000 each. While the victims say there is no price for lost family members, the cash is significant in a country where the yearly minimum wage is about \$1,500.

### Never Enough

For survivors, mostly widowers who returned from working the fields to find their dead families, no amount is enough. Many fled the area in fear after the killings. "We lived like savage animals in the mountains for three years," said Salvador Jeronimo Sanchez, who told his story in the small village chapel where the victims are buried, their names written on the walls. "We lost everything, not just our families but our crops, our houses, our traditional clothing. It cost us to rebuild our lives."

The government has promised the next two payments will arrive in December this year and at the end of 2007. Bureaucratic hurdles have delayed the money for more than 100 of those eligible for compensation. Some are listed more than once, others have died and many emigrated to the United States. ...

The case brings some closure to a rights process that began in 1994, two years before insurgents and government forces signed peace agreements that ended the war. Gen. Efraim Rios Montt ruled during the bloodiest years of the war, when the army launched a "scorched-earth" campaign against suspected guerrilla sympathizers and even wiped some villages off the map. Rights leaders want to prosecute him for genocide.

A 1999 U.N.-backed truth commission documented more than 600 massacres, largely committed by the army, during the war, but Plan de Sanchez was the first village to press for an international case. "Other communities didn't want to give any information," said Buenaventura Manuel Jeronimo, who lost 14 relatives in the massacre. "People were afraid, no one wanted to organize because they thought it could happen again."

\* \* \*

**Rights Action** has worked with Guatemalan and international organizations since the mid-1990s to support the Plan de Sanchez community in their efforts to demand and achieve justice for past State-planned and executed massacres. For more background information, go to [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org) and read: "Here We Are, We Are Alive", in Plan de Sanchez, Guatemala"

## HAITI

# Rights Action members join Haiti delegation • April 1–9, 2006

### HAITI: WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

The horrendous situation in Haiti today is rooted in 15 years of efforts by Haitian oligarchy and military elements—in collusion with the U.S., France and Canada—to undermine community-based efforts to build a democratic society.

The twice ousted governments of President Aristide (1991, 2004)—both were followed by brutal repression—were attempts of the poor majority to establish true democracy. While Aristide's leadership was not perfect, we must acknowledge the powerful, undemocratic sectors both in Haiti and internationally, which took concerted economic, political and military steps to undermine the Lavalas party governments and their achievements.

There are no easy answers to the impunity in Haiti—along with endemic racism, exploitation and poverty—but it is urgent that North American and French citizens hold their governments—as well as the United Nations, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank—accountable for their complicity. It is urgent that we continue to support

grassroots, community-based organizations in Haiti that are—despite repression and poverty—trying to re-build just communities and a just country.

Special attention will be placed on health and the environment. Haiti has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, maternal and infant mortality rates in the western hemisphere. The rapid deforestation and consequent erosion of Haiti's mainly mountainous terrain has left Haiti with less than 1% of its original forest cover. Haitians' health and the deterioration of their environment are inextricably linked.

### EDUCATIONAL SPEAKING EVENTS:

Upon return home, Rights Action delegates will be available for public presentations to NGO groups, schools and universities, church groups and activist organizations. We also aim to interest donors in supporting effective grass-root projects in Haiti. To arrange a presentation after April, contact Freddie Schrider at 202-783-1123, [Freddie@rightsaction.org](mailto:Freddie@rightsaction.org).

# RightsAction

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