

# Rights Action

www.rightsaction.org • December 2008

## Ojala... A Measure of Hope

Hi everyone,

Thank-you all very much — for again supporting Rights Action and the work of our partner groups in Guatemala and Honduras, and also in Oaxaca, Chiapas, El Salvador, Haiti and Peru.

Like many people in North America, and more around the world, we permit ourselves a measure of hope with the election of Barack Obama. In this newsletter, we reprint the words of one of our favourite writer-activists, Eduardo Galeano. In “Ojala”, he sets out the hope, along with cautionary questions and comments.

Long before and long after the US elections, it is indeed the broad notion of “ojala” that imbues our work and that of our partner groups — despite (*a pesar de*) the on-going obstacles.

Thank-you for your continuing financial support for this hopeful work.

**Annie Bird and Grahame Russell, co-directors**



PHOTO: In the Mayan-Mam village of Salitre, water springs have dried and 60 homes have been damaged due to explosives used by and tunnels dug by Goldcorp Inc, as part of its gold mining operation. On December 1, 2008, the people of Salitre passed a community decision (*acta*) determining that they do not want mining in their village. A woman signs, with her thumb, the *acta*. The young man will write her name below her thumbprint. (Photo: Grahame Russell)

### TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS:

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

### For donations of stock, contact:

Grahame Russell at [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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Go to our website at [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org).  
*This can be done anonymously.* CFC #10482

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# MEMORIAL DAY/ REMEMBRANCE DAY

Today,  
we do not remember and commemorate,  
and light a candle for  
the names and lives of  
“our” soldiers and  
“our” civilians  
killed in wars and conflicts ...

Today,  
we remember and commemorate,  
and light a candle for  
the names and lives  
of all soldiers  
“theirs” and “ours”  
of all civilians victims  
“ours” and “theirs”  
and all surviving family members and loved ones  
of “us” and “them”

Today,  
we dedicate ourselves,  
again,  
to ending all wars  
and other acts of political aggression and domination  
“ours” and “theirs”

Today,  
we dedicate ourselves,  
again,  
to another world is possible and necessary  
No more “us” and “them”.

*Thank-you, Gracias a la vida ...  
Grahame & Annie*



# OJALA

by Eduardo Galeano

Will Obama prove, from government, that his war threats against Iran and Pakistan were nothing more than words, proclaimed in order to seduce difficult ears during the electoral campaign? Hopefully.

And hopefully he does not fall for even one moment into the temptation of repeating the exploits of George W. Bush. After all, Obama had the dignity to vote against the Iraq war, while the Democratic Party and the Republican Party gave a standing ovation to the announcement of this slaughter.

During his campaign, the word "Leadership" was the most repeated in Obama's speeches. During his government will he continue to believe that his country has been chosen to save the world, the toxic idea which he shares with almost all of his colleagues? Will he continue insisting in the global leadership of the United States and its messianic mission of command?

Hopefully this current crisis, that is shaking the cement of imperialism, serves at least to give a bath of reality and humility to this government which is beginning.

Obama's victory was universally celebrated as a battle won against racism. Hopefully he takes on, through his acts in government, this beautiful responsibility.

Will Obama accept that racism is normal when it is exercised against the countries that his country invades? Is it not racism to count one by one the deaths of the invaders of Iraq and olympically ignore the many, many deaths amongst the invaded population? Is it not racist, this world, where there are citizens of first, second and third category, and deaths of first, second and third category?

Will the government of Obama confirm, yet again, that the Democratic Party and the Republican Party are two names for one party? Hopefully the desire for change, which this election has inspired, will be more than a promise and more than a hope.

Hopefully the new government will have the courage to break with the tradition of the single party, disguised as two, which in the hour of truth do more or less the same thing, while pretending to fight with one another.

Will Obama fulfill his promise of closing the sinister prison of Guantanamo? Hopefully ... And hopefully he will end the sinister trade block against Cuba.

Will Obama continue to believe that it's very good that a wall prevents Mexicans from crossing the border, while money passes without anyone asking it for a passport?

During the electoral campaign, Obama never frankly confronted the issue of immigration. Hopefully from now on, since he is no longer at risk of scaring voters, he will be able and willing to get rid of this wall, much larger and more shameful than the Berlin Wall, and with all of the walls that violate the right of people to free circulation.

Will Obama, who with much enthusiasm supported the recent gift of 750 billion dollars to bankers, govern, as is custom, in order to socialize the losses and privatize the gains?

I fear that he will, but hope he will not.

Will Obama sign and comply with the Kyoto Accord, or will he continue awarding the privilege of impunity to the nation that most pollutes on the planet? Will he govern for the automobiles or for the people? Will he be able to change the deadly mode of life of a few who raffle off the destiny of us all?

I fear that he will, but hope he will not.

Will Obama, first black president in the history of the United States, bring to reality the dream of Martin Luther King or the nightmare of Condoleezza Rice?

The White House, which now is his house, was constructed by black slaves. Hopefully he will not forget it, ever.

# Our Funding Vision and Philosophy

Getting your funds directly into the hands of community-based organizations, so that they may plan and carry out their own development (including health, education, potable water, irrigation, fair trade micro-enterprise) projects, environmental and conservation projects, human rights projects and disaster relief projects, is a major part of Rights Action's work.

**SELF-DESIGN / SELF-IMPLEMENTATION / SELF-EVALUATION.** The community based organizations we support have the principal role in implementing projects of their own design. They carry out their own, critical self-evaluation processes, as their projects advance. Rights Action staff visit regularly to carry out our evaluations.

**SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL AND DYNAMIC.** Rights Action pays particular attention to supporting new, small community-based organizations. Real change to the unjust global order must always begin where the harms and injustices are being lived and experienced.

**STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY.** To support community organizations addressing the wide range of harms and injustices (poverty and exploitation, repression, discriminations, environmental destruction, etc.), it is necessary to build their capacities: to grow in their communities in a sound, democratic way; to coordinate their work and experiences with other local, national and international organizations; to achieve greater financial diversity and sufficiency.

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## Highlights of Our Work in 2008

As of December 1, 2008, we have channeled more than US\$770,000 to our community based partner groups in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as Chiapas, El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, Peru and Oaxaca. Here we present a summary of some of the work we have been doing recently with funds from foundation and individual donors.

**GUATEMALA:** Funding and doing emergency relief work for victims of the heavy rains and mudslides in impoverished Mayan-Chorti communities of eastern Guatemala.

**HAITI:** Funding the emergency relief work of our community-based partner groups Konpay (*Konbit Pou Ayiti*) in Haiti for victims of 2 tropical storms and 2 hurricanes. The semi-permanent crisis situation in Haiti continues.

**Our disaster relief work is always done in conjunction with community organizations based in the regions where the disaster has struck; with groups that have a long term, systemic vision that poverty elimination is the most important way of avoiding the destruction and particularly deaths caused by natural disasters.**

**HONDURAS:** Funding the 2nd Continental Anti-Militarization Gathering that took place in October in La Esperanza, Honduras. Hundreds of people from across the Americas gathered to share stories and “best practices” strategies as to how to end the many harmful effects of militarization and the related repression in so many countries of the Americas.

**GUATEMALA:** Funding and directly supporting the 3rd Social Forum of the Americas that took place in October in Guatemala. Right after the Anti-Militarization Gathering, thousands of people from across the Americas came together for one week of meetings, education sessions, music and activism workshops all aimed at enabling “another world is possible, and necessary.”

**EL SALVADOR:** Funding the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Human Rights Congress “Herbert Anaya Sanabria”, named for a human rights lawyer and activist gunned down in front of his children on October 27, 1987. Our partner group, the Human Rights Collective “Herbert Anaya Sanabria” organizes this annual teach-in (aimed at educating about human rights and ending the

**A Journey in Guatemala of Transformation**

*Read and view a Photo-Essay:*  
<http://web.unbc.ca/~nolin/>



In the rural village of Agel, San Miguel Ixtahuacan, a Rights Action educational delegation visited with some of the 8 Mayan Mam women who have criminal charges against them. The Guatemalan government in conjunction with the Canadian-US mining giant Goldcorp Inc is using the legal system to “criminalize” those people whose human rights, community well-being and environment have been violated and harmed by Goldcorp’s open pit, cyanide heap leach mining operation and who are demanding justice and reparations. (Photo: Grahame Russell)



**ENDANGERED GARIFUNA COMMUNITY ON HONDURAS' NORTH, CARIBBEAN SHORE:** A Rights Action delegation visits the Indigenous Garifuna community of Barra Vieja, on Honduras's north Caribbean shore. To make way for the "Micos Golf & Beach" tourism complex, funded by the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank), the Garifuna population of Barra Vieja face forced eviction, and their community will be paved over and disappeared. Rights Action's partner group OFRANEH is leading the work in defense of the community's territorial and human rights. (Photo: Grahame Russell)

impunity of the political, economic and military elites) and supports 'recovery of the historic memory' projects throughout El Salvador.

**CANADA / GUATEMALA & MINING:** Coordinating a public 'sign-on' letter — and related educational activities — to the new Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala about "Canada's Role in Supporting the Harmful Activities of Goldcorp Inc. (previously, Glamis Gold Inc.) in San Marcos, Guatemala".

**NORTH-SOUTH EDUCATION:** Leading educational delegation-seminars of North Americans to Honduras and Guatemala to visit with Indigenous and campesino communities resisting harms caused by large-scale "development" projects like mining, hydro-electric dams and tourism.

The specific projects mentioned above have been completed in addition to our on-going work of:

- ▶ **Direct funding** of dozens of community-based organizations designing and implementing their own projects — education (schools and scholarships), community development (fair trade production, potable water), human rights (including women's, Indigenous, Afro-American), environmental defense and protection, disaster relief — in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as Chiapas, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti, Oaxaca and Peru;
- ▶ **Providing human rights accompaniment** for community leaders at risk of repression in Guatemala and Honduras;

- ▶ **Education of North Americans** related to how North America — governments and private sectors — sometimes contribute to and benefit from the poverty, environmental destruction and human rights violations that we and our partner groups work to remedy in Central America and southern Mexico.

**Please go to [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org) to read a summary report of all the projects and organizations we have supported in 2008.**

**Questions, comments, more information?** Go to [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org) or [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)

## **NEW DOCUMENTARY FILM**

# **ALL THAT GLITTERS ISN'T GOLD** **A Story of Exploitation and Resistance**

*All That Glitters Isn't Gold* ("No Todo Lo Que Brilla Es Oro — Una Historia de Explotación y Resistencia") is a 55-minute documentary that tells the stories of community members residing near Goldcorp Inc.'s open-pit, cyanide heap-leach gold mine in the Siria Valley, Honduras.

The first mine to be developed under Honduras' terrible 1996 mining law that was passed in the wake of the deadly and devastating Hurricane Mitch (some 30,000 people killed or disappeared) in 1998, the "San Martin" mine opened in 2000.

Now, as the mine nears closure, community members discuss the harms and violations they have experienced since the mine began operating - from health problems to a lack of clean water, contesting Goldcorp's claims the mine has been a model of healthy development for the community and has had no adverse effects.

Filmmaker Steven Schnoor ([steven\\_s@yorku.ca](mailto:steven_s@yorku.ca)) also made the "El Estor Evictions" (<http://www.rightsaction.org/video/elestor/index.htm>) about the harmful impacts of nickel mining on Mayan Q'eqchi' communities in eastern Guatemala.

**View the film**, in 6 parts, at: <http://www.rightsaction.org/video/gold>.

**Buy a copy**, \$25 (includes shipping), contact: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org).

**Screen the documentary**, and invite Steven Schnoor ([steven\\_s@yorku.ca](mailto:steven_s@yorku.ca)) or Grahame Russell ([info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)) to speak about these issues.

# WHAT TO DO

## **EDUCATIONAL DELEGATION-SEMINARS**

Rights Action believes strongly in bringing groups of North Americans on educational delegation-seminars, to visit with campesino and Indigenous communities and learn first hand about the issues of poverty, environmental destruction and human rights violations that they are dealing with.

If you form your own group, Rights Action would gladly organize and lead your delegation-seminar. Contact Grahame Russell to discuss this further (info@rightsaction.org)

If you would like to join one of Rights Action's regular delegation-seminars, join our list-serv (see below) or contact Grahame (info@rightsaction.org)

**JOIN** Rights Action's listserv: <http://www.rightsaction.org/lists/?p=subscribe&id=3>

**JOIN** Rights Action's quarterly newsletter list: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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

**NEWS:** Watch/listen to [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org); Read [www.upsidedownworld.org](http://www.upsidedownworld.org), [www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca)

**BOOKS TO READ:** Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*; Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*; Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*; and Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

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