

# Rights Action

info@rightsaction.org • www.rightsaction.org • September 2010

## Cracks in the Walls of Impunity

Dear friends and supporters,

As always, *la lucha sigue*, the struggle continues for “another world is possible. As always, we pass from moments of hope and inspiration, finding and trying to take advantage of cracks in the walls of impunity, to moments of sadness and stress when injustices are committed, when we are confronted with human suffering and loss.

To date, in 2010, we have channeled close to \$400,000 of your grants and individual donations to community-based partner groups in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as in El

Salvador and Haiti. As well, we have done education and activism work critically addressing the underlying, ‘local-to-national-to-global’ causes of poverty, environmental destruction and repression.

Thank-you for your trust in and support for our work, and the work of our community-based partner groups. Thank-you for continuing to send us your questions, comments, suggestions.

Annie Bird, annie@rightsaction.org

Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org

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## Highlights of Rights Action’s Work in 2010

### EMERGENCY & DISASTER RESPONSE

#### Haiti Earthquake, January 2010

In response to the most devastating and deadly “natural disaster” in the history of the Americas – over 300,000 people dead; over 1,000,000 directly harmed – Rights Action raised over \$27,000 that were channeled to a range of community based organizations providing direct relief (food, water, shelter, clothing, medical attention) to a small number of the surviving victims.

While the earthquake was a “natural” event, the unfathomable amounts of death and destruction were due principally to Haiti’s long history of exploitation, racism

and abuse at the hands of its own economic elites, in partnership with a range of other governments and a range of international economic actors, that have left a majority of Haiti’s population living and surviving in conditions of deep vulnerability.

RA does not have an on-going program of work in Haiti. We support and follow the lead of long-time Haitian organizations that we supported after the 2<sup>nd</sup> military coup against the government of President Aristide in 2004 and the massive tropical storms of 2004/ 2005.

NEW BOOK:  
Code Z59.5.  
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### TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS:

Make checks payable to “Rights Action” and mail to the appropriate US or Canadian office.

**CANADA**  
Rights Action  
552-351 Queen St E,  
Toronto ON M5A 1T8

**UNITED STATES**  
Rights Action  
Box 50887  
Washington, DC  
20091-0887

**CREDIT CARD DONATIONS**  
www.rightsaction.org.

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Grahame Russell

**PART-TIME STAFF**

Matthew Simpson

**SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Jim Schrider  
Rosalind Gill

## Highlights of Rights Action's Work

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### Tropical Storm Agatha, Guatemala, June 2010

In response to the torrential rains of Tropical Storm Agatha, that resulted in mudslides and overflowing rivers – over 100 Guatemalans were killed; thousands lost their homes; hundreds of thousands lost subsistence crops – Rights Action channeled over \$13,000 to community groups that we supported and worked with after Hurricane Stan devastated Guatemala in 2005, providing direct relief (food, water, shelter, clothing, medical attention).

The groups we work with and support have the capacity to directly deliver aid, at the same time as they have a long-term vision of community-controlled development, human rights and environmental protection – such that a majority of Guatemalans are not left living and surviving in chronic conditions of poverty and vulnerability.

### HONDURAS PRO-DEMOCRACY, ANTI-MILITARY COUP MOVEMENT



As throughout the second half of 2009, the Honduran people's pro-democracy, anti-coup regime movement keeps on marching ... and keeps on working for justice for the military coup leaders, justice for all the victims of repression committed by the coup regime, and for the re-founding of the Honduran State and society. Photo: Karen Spring

Since the June 28, 2009 military-oligarchic coup against the elected government of President Zelaya in Honduras (a coup that has important similarities with the 2004 military coup against the elected government of Haiti), we have channeled over \$125,000 to the amazing anti-coup, pro-democracy movement in Honduras.

This is a courageous and visionary struggle against a US- and Canadian-backed regime supported by the military and oligarchy that planned and carried out the coup.

This is an important struggle for the re-founding of the Honduran nation and society. At the same time, it is a struggle for the future of the Americas. In 2010, the struggle continues, at great risk of on-going repression (including assassinations, disappearances and torture).

### REFORESTATION & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

After the devastation of Hurricane Stan in 2005, Rights Action has continued funding reforestation and community environmental conservation projects in Mayan communities in the dry corridor (*corredor seco*) of central and eastern Guatemala. In 2010, we have channeled more than \$40,000 to this Program Area.

Fundamental to the struggle to end the underlying causes of poverty and exploitation are the creation and recovery of healthy living communities, beginning with the protection and recovery of the environment and natural resources, including most importantly forests and watershed areas.





Serious health harms – including skin diseases, hair loss, etc – continue to affect poor campesino and indigenous communities near to Goldcorp’s open pit, cyanide leaching mines in Honduras and Guatemala. This boy lives right near Goldcorp’s “San Martin” mine in Honduras. Photo: Carlos Amador, Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee, May 2010

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE vs. MINING & DAM MEGA-“DEVELOPMENT” PROJECTS

In Honduras and Guatemala, as well as El Salvador, Rights Action funds and support campesino and indigenous communities involved in struggles to resist the environmental and health harms and other human rights violations caused by mining companies and hydro-electric dam projects. In 2010, we have channeled more than \$100,000 to this program area.

These are comprehensive struggles in favour of community-controlled development and the ending of exploitation and poverty, in promotion of human and indigenous rights, and in support of environmental well-being.

These are struggles in resistance to harms and violations caused by large-scale “development” projects: Goldcorp Inc’s gold mining in Guatemala

and Honduras; HudBay Mineral’s nickel mining in Guatemala; Pacific Rim’s desire to mine for gold in El Salvador; the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank’s “Chixoy Dam” project in Guatemala; and more.



The FAFG – Guatemala Foundation of Forensic Anthropology – has initiated a nation wide effort to locate as many of the over 45,000 “disappeared” people as it can. With testimonies, DNA samples and exhumations, they are advancing, very slowly, in this crucial and heart rendering process. Photo: UNBC)

## JUSTICE & TRUTH FOR STATE REPRESSION & GENOCIDE

Since the early 1990s, courageous Guatemalans have exhumed mass graves, filed cases in the courts and pursued legal justice nationally and internationally for: particular massacres and the genocide; disappearances; political assassinations; torture; etc. Rights Action has funded and supported: exhumations; commemorative monuments; justice for the Rio Negro massacre, the Plan de Sanchez massacre, the Dos Erres massacre, the 2 genocide cases, the Chixoy dam reparations campaign; the Efraim Bamaca case; etc.

Since the early 90s, most of these well-documented cases have gone almost nowhere because of the broad and deeply entrenched phenomena of impunity in Guatemala – impunity

that is known about and benefitted from by a range of international companies and investors.

Since late 2009, a tiny crack has opened in the wall of impunity. Human rights and surviving-victim groups are again trying to push their cases forward. In this Program Area, in 2010 alone, we have channeled more than \$35,000 to groups seeking truth and justice.



In the La Verbena cemetery, Guatemala City zone 7, a Rights Action/ UNBC (University of Northern British Colombia) delegation spent a day, in May 2010, with the FAFG, as they were exhuming the remains of thousands of bodies from this vast mass grave. Based on what they exhume here, on testimonies and on DNA samples from surviving family members of the “disappeared”, the FAFG is fairly certain they will positively locate the remains of some of the “disappeared”, and be able to return their remains to their loved ones. Photo: UNBC

## Highlights of Rights Action's Work

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In July 2010, members of the Mayflower church, from Minneapolis/ St. Paul, came on a Rights Action delegation. Here, we are taking a boat across the flood basin of the Chixoy hydro-electric dam, to spend the night in the Mayan-Achi village of Rio Negro. The Chixoy Dam – a one billion dollar “development” project of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank – resulted in the illegal forced evictions of dozens of Mayan-Achi villages, no consultation or compensation and the massacres of over 440 villagers from Rio Negro alone. Through to today, no justice has been done for this massive crime. Both the World Bank and the IDB made hefty profits on their investments in this “development” project.

Looking up at the 125 meter high Chixoy dam. Up river, the dam flooded out and otherwise harmed some 25 Mayan communities; down river, some 7 more communities were harmed. 28 years later, no compensation or reparations have been made to the 5000 harmed villagers, let alone to the surviving family members of 444 Rio Negro villagers who were massacred.



### NORTH-SOUTH EDUCATION & ACTIVISM

It remains Rights Action's conviction that the injustices our partner groups are working to address – exploitation and poverty, environmental degradation and harm, military coups, repression – are local, national and global issues at the same time. RA focuses most of our education and activism work on how the global north – governments, inter-government agencies and private companies, investors and banks – often contribute to and benefit from the environmental harm, military coups, repression, exploitation and poverty.

In 2010, Rights Action:

- has led 6 educational seminar-delegations of North Americans to Honduras and Guatemala to learn first hand and be in solidarity with struggles related to harmful mining companies and hydro-electric dams; resistance to the coup in Honduras; efforts to achieve justice for the repression and genocide in Guatemala; etc.
- has brought community and indigenous leaders to Canada and the USA on 4 speaking tours to educate about the range of issues, including resistance to the harmful operations of North American mining companies; resistance to the military coup in Honduras; etc.
- has given dozens of education presentations in communities, universities and other public forums across Canada and the USA, about the various issues and struggles we are working on and how North Americans can and ought to get involved in work and struggle for “another world is possible”.
- has regularly published articles and reports, prepared by Rights Action and other writers, investigators, organizations – to our listserv.

### INFORMATION & ACTIVITIES OF NOTE

#### **Documentary: Goldcorp Inc & Hudbay Minerals in Guatemala**

In April, in Canada, CTV aired a W5 documentary “Lost Paradise” addressing many of the environmental and health harms and human rights violations being caused by Canadian nickel and gold mining companies in Guatemala (specifically Skye Resources, HudBay Minerals and Goldcorp Inc.). To view, visit: [http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20100415/w5\\_paradise\\_lost\\_100415/20100417](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20100415/w5_paradise_lost_100415/20100417)

#### **Chixoy Dam Reparations Campaign**

Since 1995, 32 Mayan-Achi communities – harmed and destroyed by the World Bank and IDB-funded Chixoy Hydro-Electric Dam (including the massacres of 440 in the village of Rio Negro) – have been seeking compensation and reparations from the Guatemalan government, World Bank and Inter-American Development bank.

This has been a long, torturous and courageous struggle. In mid-2010, the government of Guatemala has actually agreed to most all points in contention: that it was responsible for the illegal and forced evictions, and ensuring loss of property and land; that it owes extensive compensation and reparations to the 32 harmed and damaged Mayan communities.

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As of yet, the government has not yet signed the final agreement to then release the compensation and reparation funds and begin work on numerous re-building projects.

This extraordinary struggle, on the part of the Chixoy Dam harmed communities, hangs in the balance. For more information: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org).

### **Order to Suspend Goldcorp Inc's Mine**

The government of Guatemala has said it will abide by a ruling of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and order the suspension of Goldcorp Inc. harmful open-pit, cyanide leaching mine in San Miguel Ixtahucan (San Marcos).

As of yet, Goldcorp Inc. has refused to suspend its mining operation. As of yet, the government of Guatemala has not complied with the ruling, let alone its own promise. This extraordinary struggle, on the part of the mining-harmed communities, hangs in the balance. For more information: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org).



During a May 2010 visit to the remote Mayan Qeqchi village of Lote 8, women villagers told the UNBC and Rights Action delegation of how at least 5 of them – here 3 speak in Qeqchi to our Qeqchi-Spanish translator – were gang raped by CGN security guards and Guatemalan police and soldiers. Photo: JP Laplante, UNBC

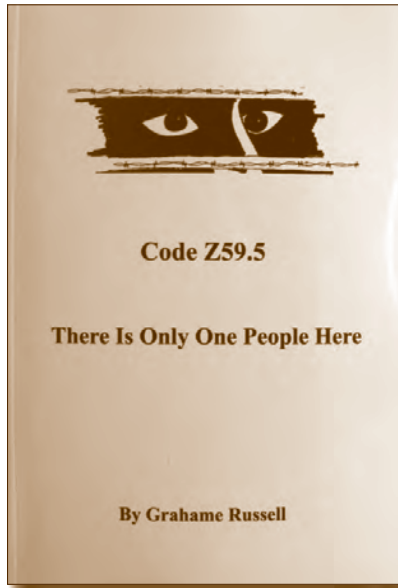
### **Investigation of Mining-Related Forced Evictions & Rape**

Rights Action and the UNBC (University of Northern British Columbia – Prince George) initiated a series of investigations and reports into the forced evictions and gang rapes of Mayan Qeqchi villagers and women and girls, that took place in 2007. These crimes were committed by Guatemalan soldiers, police and security guards hired by the CGN (Guatemalan Nickel Company), owned then by Skye Resources, now by HudBay Minerals. We are supporting the affected communities demands for justice, reparations and compensation. For more information: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org).

## NEW BOOK

# CODE Z59.5: There is Only One People Here

BY GRAHAME RUSSELL (RIGHTS ACTION CO-DIRECTOR)



With my children, Camila, aged six, and Lucas, three, we walked through our Washington DC neighborhood. Lucas says: "There is only one people here." "Who is that?" I ask. "There is Camila and me and you – one people." (January 3, 2000)

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**Code Z59.5: There Is Only One People Here** is a series of diary excerpts (comments, facts, quotes, etc.) from the 1990s and 2000s, related to the author's work in Central America, Mexico and North America, in defense of human rights, in promotion of a caring and just global economic development model.

This is a not-for-profit, self-published book. The goal is education and debate. I have done my best to properly quote people and cite sources. All mistakes and absences are my own.

### SPECIAL TRIBUTE – *Oj K'aslik*

To the victims-survivors of so many abuses and atrocities, who become protagonists and architects of just and balanced communities, countries and the global community. *Oj K'aslik* – "We are alive" in the Maya-Achi language.

**TO ORDER:** Send check or money order for US\$12.50/ Cdn\$15 to: Grahame Russell, Box 243, Collinsville CT, 06022, USA – along with your own mailing address. Or, contact Grahame directly: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), 1-860-352-2448.

***"Radical simply means grasping things at the root."***

– Angela Davis

## NEW FILM

# The Business Of Gold In Guatemala: Tale of a Conflict Foretold

Even as the government of Guatemala was signing the 1996 “Peace Accords”, it was – unbeknownst to the Guatemala population – giving out hundreds of mining concessions to international (mainly Canadian) mining companies. Since the early 2000s, serious conflicts have broken out in Guatemala – as well as else-where in Central America – due to the environmental and health harms and other violations of human and indigenous rights being caused by mainly Canadian mining companies.

“The Business of Gold in Guatemala” (50 minutes) documents one struggle – the resistance of the Mayan-Mam people of San Miguel Ixtahuacan against the Canadian company Goldcorp Inc.

**TO ORDER:** \$20. Contact Grahame Russell, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), 1-860-352-2448.

## Thank-you's, good-byes & changes

Early in 2010, we said thank-you and goodbye to **Freddie Schrider**, who worked part-time in our Washington DC office for over 10 years, and to **Francois Guindon** who worked with Rights Action in 2008-2009 in our Guatemala office.

We said thank-you and good luck to **Ruben Dominguez, Rosario Martinez** and **Martha Garcia** who worked in our Guatemala office for over 4 years. We will continue to collaborate with them.

Now, we say thank-you and good-bye to **Karen Spring**, who worked for close to 2 years with Rights Action in Guatemala and Honduras. We hope to see Karen working with us in Central America in the near future.

# How you can get involved

## EDUCATION IN YOUR HOME COMMUNITY

Contact us at [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org) to plan presentations in your community, school, place of worship, home, etc, on a wide range of issues we support (global development, human rights, the environment, etc).

## EDUCATIONAL DELEGATIONS TO CENTRAL AMERICA

Form your own group or join one of our educational, activist delegations to learn first hand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles in Central America. Get in touch at [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org).

- **JOIN** our listserv. Go to [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)
- **JOIN** our newsletter mail list. Send name and address to [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

- **CREATE YOUR OWN** email and mail lists and re-distribute our information

- **RECOMMENDED DAILY NEWS**

- [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org)
- [www.upsidedownworld.org](http://www.upsidedownworld.org)
- [www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca)

- **RECOMMENDED BOOKS**

- 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"
- Paolo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"
- Dr Seuss's "Horton Hears A Who"

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