

# Rights Action

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April 2020

## COVID-19 response fund: Some are more vulnerable than others Supporting communities in Honduras & Guatemala; forced migrants & refugees

*"Honduras is a country of pandemics: the pandemics of hunger and no access to water, of dengue, corruption, repression, and today of Covid-19. All these pandemics are inter-related. Focusing actions and resources on one pandemic -COVID-19- without an integral approach strategy, only deepens the others. That is, there will be more people living with hunger, dengue, lack of water and loss of resources due to corruption and repression."*

*-(Statement by Dr. Juan Almeyda Bonilla, Honduran physician, former university rector)*

### Dear friends,

I hope this finds you, your families and communities healthy and safe.

Rights Action understands clearly that certain communities and sectors of the U.S. and Canadian populations are suffering increased economic hardship and vulnerability due to COVID-19, and to the sanitary and isolation control measures. We support all efforts (with particular emphasis on exploited, marginalized communities) to implement rational preventative measures related to social isolation and the provision of emergency health and financial support.

### Why this funding appeal

In an unjust, unequal global human order (both inside nations, and between rich and exploited nations), many are more vulnerable than others. As Dr. Juan Almeyda said: "Honduras is a country of pandemics: the pandemics of hunger, of no access to water, dengue, corruption, repression, and today of Covid-19. All these pandemics are inter-related."

This applies equally to Guatemala, and many regions of the world, particularly in the 'global south'. It applies to exploited, discriminated sectors of the population inside rich, powerful countries.

*(continued)*

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The COVID-19 virus is infecting people from 'all walks of life'. And, as is always the case, it is infecting, harming and killing more people who live day to day, year to year, in vulnerable conditions of exploitation and poverty, discrimination and abandonment.

**We encourage folks (in a position to do so) to support Rights Action's COVID response work.** We are concerned by the now-even-more precarious living conditions of partner communities in Honduras and Guatemala – all endemically impoverished to begin with, a majority being Indigenous.

We are concerned by the precarious conditions of thousands of Guatemalans and Hondurans who had been forced to flee into exile by the endemic violence, corruption and exploitation of their military-backed governments. Many have been 'criminalized' in the U.S. Many are illegally detained in unsanitary, crowded detention centers, jails and ad hoc camps in Mexico and the U.S.

Their jail and detention conditions were unsanitary and crowded before the spread and on-set of COVID-19.

It bears repetition that the Honduran and Guatemalan regimes are fully supported by the U.S. and Canadian governments, and by a multitude of global companies and investors that are taking advantage of the endemic conditions of corruption and exploitation –let alone violence– to operate profitable mines and hydro-electric dams; to produce 'for-export' coffee, sugarcane, African palm, bananas and pineapples; and to operate garment 'sweat-shop' factories and tourism businesses.

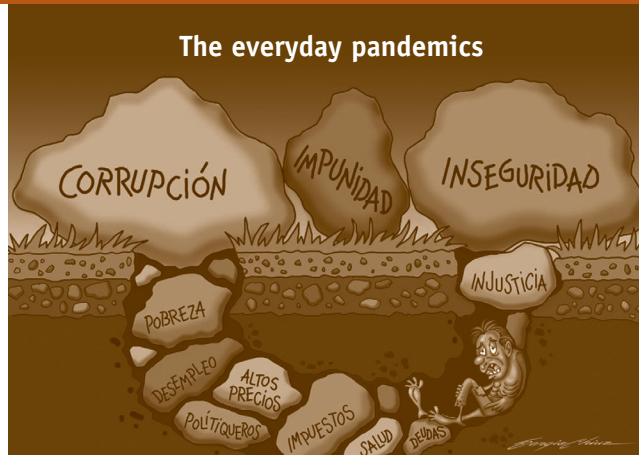
As this newsletter is being written, the Maya Q'eqchi' people of El Estor, Guatemala, are increasingly fearful of the spreading of COVID-19, as the Solway Investment Group (a Swiss-Ukrainian company) continues to illegally operate its mine via its subsidiary CGN, obliging local employees to show up to work. 100s of trucks come and go from the processing plant to coastal shipping docks, every day. 100s of employees come and go, every day.

Canada, U.S. and the so-called international community are happy to do business-as-usual with these regimes that have little interest, let alone capacity, to prioritize and support their most vulnerable, exploited communities in normal times, let alone when confronted with a global pandemic such as COVID-19.

In response to COVID-19, the Honduran and Guatemalan regimes have declared 'states of exception' and imposed military enforced curfews. Without exaggeration,



We prioritize getting funds directly to these same partner groups because they are people from the very communities being devastated and are in the best position to provide immediate and trusted support.



The everyday pandemics

these militarization measures have been and are the main thrust of the regimes' COVID-19 response measures, for a majority of their populations!

Many sectors of the 'informal economy' have been shut down, where a significant percentage of the populations eek out their survival. Even as people fear possible large-scale outbreaks of COVID-19, there is equal fear that many will soon face increased risk of death by starvation and disease, as they live precariously in the best of times, and are now restricted even more so from surviving at a subsistence level.



Hoping and preparing for the best, Rights Action fears the worst in terms of possible COVID-19 outbreaks in either or both countries.

### Who we are prioritizing

Rights Action is sending COVID-19 response funds to community groups we have funded and worked with for many years, including people involved in land, human rights and environmental defense struggles related to mining and hydro-electric dam projects, tourism, and the 'for export' production of sugar cane and African palm.

### Remembering Hurricane Mitch (1998) and Hurricane Stan (2005)

Some Rights Action supporters will recall that in both 1998 and 2005 (as well as responding to less devastating hurricanes, mud-slides and earthquakes over the years), Rights Action coordinated efforts to channel as much funds as possible to our long-term

partner groups. We prioritize getting funds directly to these same partner groups because they are people from the very communities being devastated and are in the best position to provide immediate and trusted support.

### Initial grants have been sent to:

- **Mayan Q'eqchi' partners** in the mining/ dams/ African palm harmed communities of eastern Guatemala.
- **Indigenous Garifuna partners** in the tourism/ African palm/ narco-trafficking harmed communities of Honduras' north coast.
- **Indigenous Lenca partners** in the logging/ dams/ mining harmed communities of western Honduras.
- **Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals** forced to flee community defense struggles in Honduras and Guatemala, now caught in precarious refugee conditions in the U.S. or along the U.S.-Mexican border.

### Community organizations are using funds to:

- **Educate about seriousness of COVID pandemic**, particularly as government and media information sources are of little to no use for poor majority.
- **Educate about primary importance of social isolation** and cleaning hands and living spaces with soap, as much as possible.
- **Monitor, and limit** (as possible) the coming and going of people into communities.
- With maximum sanitary precaution, carry out **home visits** to monitor community members' health.
- Where possible, establish community locations to **isolate and support community members** suspected of contracting COVID.
- Prioritize education and support for the **elderly**.
- **Educate about strengthening immune systems** through the use of herbal teas grown, and consumption of productions produced locally for generations.

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