



# CAMINOS

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*A program of the Denver Justice & Peace Committee (DJPC), advocating for lasting peace and economic justice in Guatemala*

*CAMINOS is currently sponsoring Jordan Buckley, who traveled to Guatemala in July 2006 as our tenth human rights accompanier. He will continue to accompany witnesses in the genocide trials through May 2007. This is Jordan's third update from Guatemala.*

Hello family, friends and allies,

This is my third update from Guatemala: I am working as a human rights accompanier with the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR), a coalition of Maya genocide survivors organizing to charge ex-military and political leaders for the state-led violence that wiped out more than 200,000, largely indigenous people in the 1980s.

A few weeks ago, a boy who lived near us in Ilom suddenly passed away one morning. His mother and neighbors calmly explained that he had died of sadness. His father had left the day before to the United States out of economic desperation and his departure had been absolutely devastating for the boy - to the extent that he never woke up.

Death by emotion is not uncommon here. In listening to friends' recounting of the genocide, *susto*, or fright, is often given as an explanation of loved ones' deaths following the actual army-led

massacres: when they lived enslaved on a nearby plantation or in their village under violent military occupation (as in the case of those from Ilom), and when they fled from army search squads into the wilderness to take cover from aerial bombardments (as in the case of those from Xix).

Last month marked the ten-year anniversary of the Peace Accords, the ceasefire agreement which ended army attacks on Maya villages as official state policy. (A practice the military justified for the supposed purpose of hunting down guerrilla fighters.)

A decade later, still none of the major players responsible for the 626 massacres led by the army have been charged with anything. That status has not changed since my last update, and most certainly will not change until a formidable popular movement, on both the national and global level, compels Guatemalan officials to take seriously the willingness of AJR members to risk their lives by serving as witnesses in the stalled genocide cases here against these men who still retain substantial influence.

A small but important way to support the AJR is by e-mailing Guatemalan officials and urging them to advance the genocide case. (Visit: [http://nisgua.org/get\\_involved/action\\_alerts/action\\_alert\\_02.asp](http://nisgua.org/get_involved/action_alerts/action_alert_02.asp))

## THE ZAPATISTAS: ANOTHER FRONT OF MAYAN RESISTANCE

I was in Chiapas, Mexico for the new year - and incidentally my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday - at the Encounter of the Zapatista Peoples with the Peoples of the World. As many of you know, the Zapatistas first made headlines on January 1, 1994, when an armed uprising enabled them to liberate indigenous communities from the rule of Mexican authorities.



Part of a municipal building mural in San Jose Poaquil, Chimaltenango, which documents the repression suffered in Guatemala's 36 year civil war. Photo credit: Elisa Echeverría

28 years of solidarity  
[www.denjustpeace.org](http://www.denjustpeace.org)

Across Chiapas, signs marking the entrance to Zapatista territory inform passersby that, "Here the people give the orders and the government obeys."

Having lived and worked intimately with folks from the AJR since July, it was fascinating to learn from other Maya communities, situated just a little northwest across that militarized invisible line which only shows up on maps, of how they are likewise rebelling against the government's wishes - although clearly with different tactics and aims; embracing women's rights and participation; amplifying indigenous voices and decision-making; all the while cultivating a huge, dynamic base of international support, something the AJR comparatively does not possess.

The revolutionary fervor and cultural pride of our Zapatista hosts there in autonomously-governed village of Oventic stand in stark contrast to much of the evangelical fanaticism which has enveloped the villages where I live in the Guatemalan highlands.

Many, if not most, Zapatistas wore traditional clothing, spoke only in their indigenous languages, shared their customary music and dance with us out-of-towners during several of the planned cultural events, and spoke spiritedly about their commitment to preserving their culture. Back in Guatemala, a friend in Ilom who is evangelical, recently lamented that evangelical Christianity, which strikingly swept through in concert with the genocide, crushed his people's indigenous practices and beliefs.

### EVANGELISM, GENOCIDE & RÍOS MONTT

Efraín Ríos Montt, the evangelical minister/military general who rose to power in 1982 from a military coup, remains the veritable face of the genocide. According to a UN-led commission, Ríos Montt's short-lived regime was responsible for the deaths of some 70,000 people, mostly indigenous Maya. He is credited with crafting a domestic policy summed up

by the following, "If you are with us, we'll feed you. If not, we'll kill you."

Even before Ríos Montt's reign, evangelical Christianity had begun to take root in Guatemala. Ruling elites favored evangelism to the liberation theology-inspired brand of Catholicism which was offering impoverished Guatemalans much more than charity and sympathy. Liberation theology offered solidarity in organizing against the structural causes of their poverty and repression.

By the 1980s, televangelist Pat Robertson's show "The 700 Club" enjoyed more than 3 million viewers here. Within a week of the military overthrowing the government and Ríos Montt seizing the nation's helm,

Robertson hopped a plane to Guatemala City to meet with and exalt the new leader on a broadcast to his enormous TV audience. Robertson soon wrote of the man whose immediate arrest is now demanded by Spanish courts on charges of genocide, "I found [Ríos Montt] to be a man of humility, impeccable personal integrity, and a deep faith in Jesus Christ."

While Ríos Montt was attempting to effectively exterminate the Mayan people of his country, Robertson was raising funds for the Guatemalan military through a telethon; he convinced numerous U.S. Christians to donate to

International Love Lift (revealingly abbreviated "ILL"), Ríos Montt's so-called relief program, for funding and supplies used to support the army in its genocidal campaign.

The Christian Broadcasting Network also reportedly provided agricultural and medical technicians as well as money to aid in the design of Ríos Montt's first "model villages": barbed wire-enclosed, military-controlled townships, often rebuilt upon the same land as the original Maya villages scorched to the ground by the army, where massacre survivors were forcibly "re-educated." Theological re-education was routinely administered by evangelical missionaries.



For a full day and night the people watched over the remains of their martyred relatives in the main church. Then they brought them back to their homes in the villages and sat with them before the re-burials. Nebaj, Quiché, Guatemala, 2001.  
© Jonathon Moller



## EVANGELISM TODAY, IMPUNITY & MY GRINGO BEWILDERMENT

Nowadays, dancing in the highlands is pervasively a sin; our radio is clogged with evangelical rock. I dined at God with Us Emmanuel Pizzeria last week, and the gas station where our ride to Ilom usually fills up is coated in the slogan "To God be the Glory." We are engrossed in evangelism, and its political consequences can be bewildering. On Jan. 17, for instance, one of the nation's most famous evangelicals, Ríos Montt, announced that he is running for the presidency of the National Congress in September's elections, a post that he has a considerable shot at winning and which he previously held as recently as November 2003.

A few hours after the boy in Ilom died of sadness, the 10-year-old son of one of the witnesses we accompany in that same village also passed away. A couple of days later we visited him to express our condolences. He soon asked us if it was true that in the U.S. some people cremate their loved ones. We told him it is indeed common. He remarked that given the absence of rule of law in Guatemala, if a community wills it, they will often capture a local criminal and burn him alive to set an example for others. But to burn the body of a person who is already dead is simply a sin against God.

Perhaps needless to say, making sense of the reality of the highlands continues to be complicated for me. One revelation that has kept me somewhat grounded is that while I admire and am inspired by the radical resistance of the Zapatistas, for my fellow evangelical colleagues who outlived a horrific genocide targeted at them, basic survival was, and remains, its own form of radical resistance.

And acting in a way that shuns the often evangelical expectation that they quietly endure their extreme poverty and suffering to wait indifferently for afterlife, by demanding justice and publicly naming those responsible for the genocide despite the terrifying consequences, reflects remarkable bravery and commitment.

I know I have a lot to learn from the AJR before I leave in May, and I am extremely grateful to be working with them. Again, I would ask you to honor their courage by e-mailing Guatemalan officials to urge them to advance the genocide case and finally allow the AJR to testify, to speak their truth to power.

Lastly, thanks to everyone who has been e-mailing me, writing me letters, donating to the struggle and sending me food, art and literature. Your kindness, friendship and solidarity has been wonderful and deeply appreciated.

In solidarity and love  
Jordan



Jordan's young friend Laura from Ilom.  
Photo Credit: Jordan Buckley,

P.S. My pal Elias recently interviewed the president of the AJR, with whom I live in Ilom, about his obligatory participation in, and dangerous escape from, the army-led civilian militias.  
(Visit: <http://wiretapmag.org/race/42939/>)

P.P.S. To donate to the Guatemala Accompaniment Project and my work as a volunteer, write a tax-deductible check to DJPC Education Fund, add "Jordan Buckley-CAMINOS" to the memo line and mail it to: Denver Justice & Peace Committee, 901 W. 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue Suite 7, Denver, CO 80204

# CAMINOS 10TH ANNIVERSARY DELEGATION TO GUATEMALA FEB 1 – 10, 2007



**Above:** Promotores de Salud (healthcare workers) with delegate Catherine Raveczky in health clinic.  
Photo Credit: Vince Orlando

**Below:** Transportation adventures!  
Delegates arrive in El Tesorito via pick-up truck.  
Photo © Jonathan Moller



**Above:** Four swimmers in El Tesorito.  
Photo Credit: Denise Peine

**Right:** El Tesorito welcomes delegates into their community.  
Photo Credit: Jane Covode

