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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 as our tenth human rights companioner. This is Jordan's second update from Guatemala.

Hello friends, family and others,

This is my second update from Guatemala. Every few months I am sending out news regarding the struggle led by indigenous survivors of state-led violence here to demand justice for the top military officers and government leaders who ordered the massacring of their loved ones, the physical torture they endured and the scorching of their houses, crops, livestock, even family members - indeed, often their entire community.

My life in Ilom is filled with numerous sorts of butterflies, afternoon rainbows, wildflowers galore, untamed fruit growing throughout the surrounding jungle, and I routinely bathe beneath a waterfall. As close to paradise as this all may seem, a horrendous history and complicated community dynamic lurk beneath the surface: there is no electricity, extreme poverty is rampant, illness is prevalent, likewise malnutrition, and several of the village's residents live under constant threat for their willingness to hold powerful men accountable for abhorrent acts perpetrated in 1982 that changed the community forever.

Remnants of Genocide Abound

While the unconscionable military campaign officially ended in 1996 (during which the state's self-titled "scorched earth" tactics burnt no less than 440 Maya communities completely to the ground, erasing them from the map), its intellectual architects have continued to enjoy a leisurely existence and substantial power within the political system.

In the Ixil, the region where I am accompanying witnesses pursuing the national legal case charging eight former military men and officials with genocide, a man named Otto Molina hovers larger-than-life on billboards above homes and roadways.

While much of the country knows him as a presidential contender in next year's elections whose slogan, "Urge aun Mano Dura" (A Firm Hand Is Urgently Needed) is splayed beneath a picture of him scowling, a fist anchored at his chin, looking eager to hurt someone. Many folks in the Ixil tell me they simply remember him as the military general who presided over the genocide in their communities. The Ixil Maya, who constitute the overwhelming majority in the region, were particularly hard hit by the state's so called "counterinsurgency" campaign when an estimated 14.5% of the population was killed.



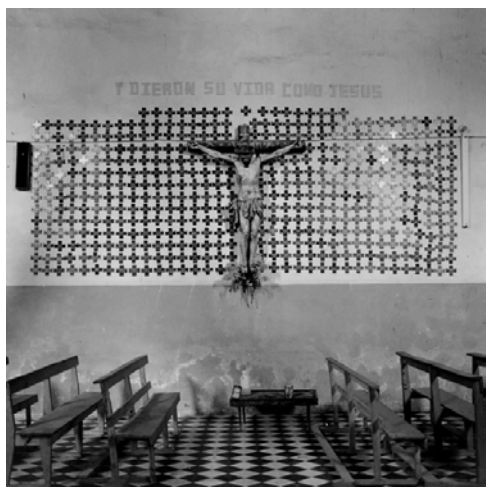
Good Friday celebration. CPR-Sierra, Pal, Xeputul, 1994.
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27 years of solidarity
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However, the military ceasefire by no means signifies that the violence has altogether disappeared. Arguably, given the prevalence of impunity and a shift in the concentration of power, the violence may have simply lessened marginally, if at all, and become relatively decentralized.

For example, Guatemala, despite posting a national population of approximately three million people LESS than the state of Florida, nonetheless averages 17 murders per day this year. And according to an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* last month, only three percent of these cases have been prosecuted! *Prensa Libre*, Guatemala's leading daily newspaper, recently calculated that 83% of the murders were perpetrated by organized crime groups. It's worth mentioning that a Swedish scholar investigating such groups told me that Molina, the firm-handed general gunning for the nation's top post, directs *El Sindicato*, one of the nation's most powerful organized crime gangs.

What will it require for Guatemala to start punishing a criminal for killing someone, or even an organized crime ring for mass murder, when dictators and military heads are allowed to get away with the genocide of over 200,000 people?



The crosses on the side wall of this church bear the names of those killed or "disappeared" in Cotzal. 1993.
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Thinking About Terror

And what is terror, a truly everyday terror? Can governments perpetuate terrorism as in a genocide, or is that a term solely reserved for groups operating outside of a state framework, such as organized crime or cells of violent extremists?

Phrased another way that hits closer to home, given the United States' planet-wide commitment to battling "terror"- a campaign that invests over \$1 billion a week in civil war-torn Iraq alone, which is more contradictory to our government's stated aims? To have funded and trained the Guatemalan military leaders that the CIA then reported were carrying out these unthinkable and reprehensible deeds? Or the U.S. government's recent extensive lobbying effort to place Guatemala - its obvious puppet - in a prominent post within the United Nations. Therefore proposing that a government overseeing 17 unpunished murders a day and a yet unpunished genocide somehow qualifies to serve on the UN Security Council?

Updates On the Genocide Case Front

Thankfully, the courage of survivors is pushing crucial boundaries, among them the right to talk publicly about the genocide and name its perpetrators. Although the genocide case has languished in the investigative stage since its first filing in national courts in 2000, on October 4th the Asociación para Justicia y Reconciliación (the AJR is the coalition of survivors that request our accompaniment) made an important legal move, formally urging the District Attorney to initiate the next stage of the legal process. The AJR also decided to focus the case on the Ixil region (the communities I will be accompanying until summer) and former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who reigned over the grisliest chapters of the genocide. The AJR symbolically filed the legal demand on B' elejeb' Tz'i', the Day of Justice in the ceremonial Mayan calendar.

On October 15th, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), the political party Ríos Montt directs as its secretary general, announced that he would be their natural candidate for the presidential elections next year. The FRG constitutes the largest faction in Congress, and continues to be one of the most powerful forces in Guatemala. If elected, or even accepted by courts as a candidate, Ríos Montt would qualify for "antijucio"- a type of amnesty law for elected officials and candidates that ostensibly protects them from pending court cases. Importantly, this amnesty would allegedly cover charges of genocide.

The FRG's declaration of backing for Ríos Montt's presidential bid in part stems from an announcement on October 10th by the Guatemalan Constitutional Court that Ríos Montt should have been legally disqualified from running in the last election (when he mobilized riots of machete-brandishing FRGistas to scare the Court into allowing him to run, resulting in the death of a journalist), nor can he run in 2007. Oddly, the court stated that in 2003 they erred by failing to heed grammatical rules of tense for the verb "to be". Yep, that's right.

All this was eclipsed by the arrest of two perpetrators sought in the genocide case on November 5th. The Guatemalan justice system conceded to arrest warrants sent by Spanish courts charging these men with various crimes, including genocide; Spain argues if Guatemala can't or won't prosecute these men, then they will under universal jurisdiction.

Strikingly exempt from the Guatemalan arrests was, you guessed it, Ríos Montt. I was lucky to observe hundreds of fired-up rural Maya genocide survivors and their capitol city allies march on the Supreme Court demanding Ríos Montt's capture, transforming it with political theatre, speeches in several different Maya languages and a spirited installation of graffiti on the high court's plaza.

Passing Time in the Highlands

I've mostly been chatting with witnesses about their stories and ideas on a number of subjects including governance, survival, gender, political autonomy and multi-national mega-projects. I also read a lot, perhaps 4-5 hours a day. Most recently I've read biographies on Harriet Tubman, Ella Baker and Malcolm X. I am also translating some of the works of Oaxacan journalist-philosopher Ricardo Flores Magón into English. My spoken Ixil, which is the only language most women and many men use in Ilo, is proceeding slowly, far slower than I'd like. Besides that, it's primarily soccer, frisbee and hacky sack with children. I feel very comfortable and adjusted here but acknowledge that, along with the witnesses, we must heighten our diligence to security given the shift in focus on Ríos Montt, the Ixil region, as well as the quickly approaching elections.

I would love to hear from any of you and learn what you are up to, thinking about, working on. It may take me a while to respond due to infrequent internet access, but it would be great to collapse geography some by catching up with an e-mail. Many thanks to those of you who have mailed me magazines, zines, good, cowboy-themed bandanas and the like. Also I very much appreciate the financial help from those who have been so kind to share their money and support our volunteer accompaniment project.

It is a privilege to be working toward justice with the inspiring survivors of the Ixil and to rely on the solidarity of friends and allies (via circulating news and our updates, donations, etc.) to collaborate in holding these powerful, genocidal men accountable for their crimes, particularly by amplifying the voices and struggles of those who endured, and still endure, their terror.

In Solidarity,
Jordan



By the edge of an open grave. Nebaj, Quiché, 2000
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Annual Vigil to Close the School of the Americas

By Roxana Newton

Many argue that the world has become a small place. If that is true, why is it there are so many atrocities happening every day in our own backyard that remain unknown or unacknowledged?

On November 17-19, twenty-two thousand people converged for the Annual Vigil to Close the School of the Americas. Established in Panama in 1946, the SOA is a combat training school run by the U.S. military for Latin American soldiers. According to former Panamanian president, Jorge Illueca, the SOA was the "biggest base for destabilization in Latin America" and was subsequently kicked out of the country in 1984, and given a home in Fort Benning, Georgia.

The SOA was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) allegedly to escape its nickname "School of Assassins." Despite the name change, the curriculum remains the same. The institute has trained over 60,000 Latin American soldiers in counter-insurgency techniques, sniper training, commando and psychological warfare, military intelligence and interrogation tactics. A significant number of the school's former students have used such skills to wage war against their own people and as a result hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been tortured, raped, killed and/or have gone missing in past decades.



In 1996, the United States Pentagon released SOA training manuals advocating torture, execution and extortion. Despite hundreds of documented reports of human rights abuses linked to SOA graduates, the institute has never been independently investigated.

The SOA played an important role in three military dictatorships that ruled Guatemala from 1978-1986. SOA graduates in high military positions included four of eight military officials in the cabinet of Lucas Garcia, six out of nine under Ríos Montt and five out of ten under Mejía Victores. The counter-insurgency tactics masterminded by the military dictators and their high command resulted in genocide which claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Guatemalans and led to the disappearance and torture of tens of thousands more. The vast majority of the victims were indigenous Mayans. The bodies of these victims are still being excavated from clandestine graves.

Through the SOA, the US government and military are implicated in this dark history of atrocity. As an American, it is hard to fathom the reality of this situation-these acts occurred in my lifetime, and I had no idea. The truth is scary but I ask you to research the overwhelming evidence for yourself, analyze what you learn and then act. Each person can make a difference, starting with empowering yourself through education.

Community leaders offer a prayer at the beginning of an exhumation at the site of a clandestine cemetery in the mountains near the village of Nebaj. Quiché, 2000.

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