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A Question of Justice



Photo: Elperiodico.com

Hundreds gather during the trial of former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who was formally charged with genocide in January.

The election of Otto Pérez Molina, a former military general accused of crimes against humanity, to the Presidency of Guatemala raises a number of significant questions. One of these questions, however, stands out from all of the others because it speaks to Guatemala’s nefarious past, uncertain present, and fragile hopes for the future:

What will justice look like during the next four years?

Pérez Molina, founder of the right-wing Patriot Party, centered his presidential campaign on the promise of “la mano dura,” an “iron fist” approach to fighting crime.

Only time will tell if Otto Pérez Molina is any more successful than the last president who came to power using the “mano dura” rhetoric: Alfonso Portillo of Ríos Montt’s FRG party. Not only did Portillo fail to curb the increasing crime rates during his four years as president, he now sits in a Guatemalan jail awaiting extradition to the US on money laundering charges.

The Wheels of Justice

Guatemala’s recent history is tainted by some of the cruelest, most brutal and horrific acts of violence ever committed. The internal armed conflict (1960 -1996) was the stage upon which unimaginable ter-

ror, pain, and agony was unleashed upon the civilian, mostly indigenous, population. Hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children suffered rape, torture, forced disappearance, massacres, assassinations and other heinous crimes at the hands of the Guatemalan military and paramilitary forces.

For many years the dominant culture of impunity denied victims and their families access to justice. Those responsible for planning and carrying out these heinous crimes against humanity rested easily in the knowledge that the Guatemalan justice system was broken and incapable

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GHRC Mission

Founded in 1982, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a non-profit, nonpartisan, humanitarian organization that monitors, documents, and reports on the human rights situation in Guatemala, advocates for survivors of human rights abuses in Guatemala, and works toward positive, systemic change.

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Letter from New Development and Advocacy Coordinator, Kathryn Johnson

I went to Guatemala to learn Spanish. I had heard that there were inexpensive schools in Xela and after a year in India without learning anything more than “Namaste,” I swore never to travel again without first learning the language of my host country. Thanks to the

amazing teachers at Proyecto Lingüístico Quetzalteco, I learned much, much more than a language. I learned about the history and reality of a country and its people, as well as my own country’s role in that history. I learned about how a fruit company destroyed a democratic dream and how that destruction was just one more step in a long history of violence and theft from an indigenous majority.

What I was learning seemed to keep coming back to land---from the old *latifundios* and vagrancy laws which essentially constituted slavery, to the overthrow of the democratic govern-

Now, I get to devote my time to doing the work I love, supporting people that constantly amaze me, with a network of thousands of activists.

ment by the CIA in 1954, to the fierce resistance to megaprojects today. So when I saw a flier for a delegation with the Guatemala Solidarity Project (GSP) focused on *campesino* movements and their resistance to displacement, it seemed like a natural continuation of my education. I was thrilled when, at the end of the delegation, I was offered an opportunity to join GSP and support the communities which I had visited as well as several others. Over the next couple of years, the community leaders I worked with through GSP constantly amazed and inspired me with their strength, resilience and resourcefulness, and I was honored to work with them

However, I kept bumping against the reality of how incredibly damaging and counterproductive so many of the policies of my own country are. The combination of our drug policy, our trade policy and our immigration policy all seemed maliciously designed to keep the majority of Guatemalans trapped in an unequal capitalist system with the rules stacked against them. It started to seem foolish to keep working



in Guatemala when so many problems stemmed from the US. So I came back; sad to say goodbye to a country which was beginning to feel like home, but, I will admit, also relieved to be away from heart-breaking violence and at times suffocating insecur-

ity.

In graduate school, I slogged through the occasionally tedious classes on accounting, statistics, management and policy, but was sustained by the weeks and months that I was able to steal back to Guatemala, back to the communities risking their lives to defend their land and back to the overwhelming hospitality that I have found in the regions where I worked. When I graduated last June, I was afraid I was going to have to find some other line of work. Unfortunately, there aren’t many organizations here in the States working in solidarity with Guatemala, and certainly not many able to hire new staff, so I jumped at the chance to work with GHRC.

Now, I get to devote my time to doing the work I love, supporting people that constantly

amaze me, with a network of thousands of activists. I also get to do this work from the belly of the beast, Washington DC, where I can physically track down our elected representatives when they don’t respond if need be. Through GHRC I have also had the opportunity to branch out to other areas of human rights not so directly connected to land, like supporting the courageous women’s organizations working against violence and femicide.

As you all know, it’s a tough time to be involved in struggles for human rights in Guatemala, with escalating violence and what’s looking like a return to military rule. However, it’s also a time of great opportunity, as Guatemalans continue to speak out despite great risk to themselves, and more and more Americans are aware of the impact of our policies on the world. So, I for one am looking forward to taking advantage of this opportunity and seeing what we can accomplish together.

In solidarity,
Kathryn Johnson

Criminalization and Assassinations of Human Rights Defenders on the Rise

Victor Leiva was a young artist and founding member of *Caja Ludica*, an arts collective working to rebuild Guatemala's social fabric through art and culture. Known as "el mono" – the monkey – Leiva danced and performed on stilts, working to engage youth in positive and creative activities. He was only 24 when, on February 2, 2011, he was shot twice in the head on the street in Guatemala City. To date, no one has been arrested for his murder.

Victor was one of 19 human rights defenders assassinated in 2011, according to UDEFEGUA's annual report, more than double the number killed in 2010, and higher than any year in the past decade.

Defenders play an important role in Guatemala. They work to promote and defend both individual and community rights, denounce impunity, and/or accompany community leaders on a myriad of issues, including women's rights, indigenous land rights, and the right to justice and truth. They are the nation's community leaders, journalists, advocates, government watchdogs, and whistleblowers.

The ongoing lack of prevention, protection of defenders, or prosecutions of those responsible, is an institutional and systemic problem; even the government's human rights agencies provide little support. While the government is directly responsible for attacks against defenders in some cases, threats and aggressions are more frequently carried out by non-state actors. The government plays a supporting role, providing protection for the company or other special interest, stalling or neglecting to investigate attacks, or ordering judicial action against a defender.

According to UDEFEGUA, the criminalization of defenders is an emerging pattern in which human rights defenders or community leaders are accused of a crime, and Guatemala's courts are manipulated to legitimize the process. Criminalization highlights the power of special interests -- whether judges, mayors, or businessmen working through local authorities -- to co-opt legal mechanisms for their own benefit. Cases often pit wealthy special inter-



"El Mono lives: Justice for Victor Leiva"

ests or local powerbrokers against impoverished indigenous community leaders, a process which disproportionately affects the time, energy, resources, and wellbeing of the accused. Furthermore, it can lead to destructive rumors and fuel defamation campaigns. The criminalization of defenders often results in jail time for the victims of a crime, while the true perpetrator walks free.

In such cases, Guatemala's notoriously weak judicial system suddenly appears to function smoothly: arrest warrants are acted upon quickly, trials occur, and sentences are given to those found "guilty". Yet clearly, when case after case with little to no relevant evidence presented leads to guilty verdicts, justice is not the objective; the courts simply "go through the motions" of judicial protocol as justification for punishing human rights activists. The defendants are left to prove their innocence, rather than the prosecution proving them guilty, and the sentences they receive can be unusually severe for the crime for they are accused.

The case of Abelardo Curup from San Juan Sacatepéquez, which began in 2008, is especially illustrative. Abelardo, 62, is a community leader involved in opposition to a cement company in the region. The company's operations were ad-

versely affecting 15 thousand people in nearby communities. When three people were murdered, Abelardo was arrested and taken to trial. The prosecuting attorney – who also happened to be the legal representative of the cement company – went so far as to request the expansion of charges against him, calling him a "person considered to be dangerous", presumably referring to his community activism. Despite a severe lack of evidence, inconsistent witness testimony, and numerous procedural violations, Abelardo was given a 150-year prison sentence in July of 2009, and ordered to pay Q1.036.300 (approximately US \$130,000) to the families of the victims. His appeal was denied.

While there was not a clear case against Abelardo, there was, in fact, enough evidence to pursue an investigation of the "citizen security" group that had been reportedly carrying out acts of social cleansing in the area. The group consists of several former military members that work on behalf of the cement company. Meanwhile, activists continue to receive threats and intimidations, and despite reporting to the proper authorities, no investigation has been made into these acts. Community members in San Juan estimate that some 85 people have been victims of criminal prosecutions and fines due to their opposition to the cement company. Currently four people have active arrest warrants and four others are in jail.

UDEFEGUA and other organizations have denounced ongoing assassinations of defenders, and the pattern of increasing criminalization, to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, hoping that the international community can provide much needed support for defenders, and pressure on the Guatemalan government and courts to apply the rule of law appropriately.

GHRC continues to support human rights defenders through advocacy, awareness raising, direct support for emergency relocation, and educational support funds for children of defenders.

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of convicting those who so rightly belong behind bars.

Only now, some fifteen years after the signing of the peace accords, is Guatemala beginning to prosecute those responsible for ordering and participating in the atrocities committed during the armed conflict.

In 2007 the UN International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) gave the Guatemalan justice system some much-needed support by providing independent investigations into organized crime and corruption. In 2010, lawyer and human rights activist, Dr. Claudia Paz y Paz, was appointed as Guatemala's first female Attorney General, awaking latent hopes for long-overdue justice in Guatemala. The wheels of justice may turn slowly in Guatemala, but they were indeed turning.

Campaign against Claudia Paz y Paz.

A woman of outstanding personal and professional values, Dr. Paz y Paz has worked diligently to strengthen the institutions of the Public Ministry responsible for investigating and prosecuting crimes of the past and present. Through her tireless dedication and courage she challenged the culture of impunity that has historically denied victims and their families access to justice.

Dr. Paz y Paz has not been afraid to tackle major human cases and prosecute the crimes against humanity committed during the armed conflict. Army officials are finally being held accountable for their role in the genocide committed against the population.

Unfortunately, in seeking to prosecute the material and intellectual authors of these crimes, the Attorney General has awoken the ire of pro-military structures and organizations. Since the victory of Pérez Molina's Patriot Party those who oppose her work have become increasingly vocal and confrontational.

Ricardo Méndez Ruiz Valdés is one of those opponents. He was kidnapped by guerilla forces in 1982 while his father

served as Interior Minister for the Ríos Montt regime. He recently presented a baseless lawsuit against 32 supposed members of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), including Dr. Paz y Paz's recently deceased father. An emboldened Méndez Ruiz confirmed that the lawsuit was meant to harass and intimidate the attorney general. "Yes, this is political," exclaimed Méndez Ruiz. "It is against the Attorney General, for the love of god, I'm taking aim at her."

Since then, two more criminal complaints have been brought against large groups of supposed members of the guerrilla movement for acts committed during the internal armed conflict. Both complaints read as a who's-who of the human rights com-



Dr. Claudia Paz y Paz

mala. Before entering the courtroom, General Montt was met by survivors of his mass killings, torture and rape, who shouted the historic slogan: "Because the color of blood will never be forgotten, the massacred will be avenged." ("¡Porque el color de la sangre jamás se olvida, los masacrados serán vengados!") The dictator's only response was a smug, self-righteous smile. Twelve hours later, as overwhelming evidence and testimony had been presented against him, the smile was gone, and evidently the words of the Maya Ixil people were still echoing in his mind. His only comment during the entire trial was a worried plea towards the very end: "The point here is to seek justice, not vengeance."

The former general's lawyers attempted something akin to a reverse "Nuremberg defense." The Nazi officials at the Nuremberg trials claimed that they could not be held guilty for actions that were ordered by a superior officer. Ríos Montt, as head of the military junta, president of the country, and Commander-in-Chief of

Only now, some fifteen years after the signing of the peace accords, is Guatemala beginning to prosecute those responsible for ordering and participating in the atrocities committed during the armed conflict..

munity and the left including journalists, authors, attorneys and the former first lady Sandra Torres; the cases included the Attorney General's father and a total of 12 other family members.

According to the Guatemalan Constitution, the attorney general serves for a period of four years. In order to guarantee the separation of powers, the president can only remove Dr. Paz y Paz from her position if there exists a "duly justified and substantiated reason." Although Pérez Molina, under immense international pressure, has publicly stated that he will not remove the Attorney General from office, it remains to be seen how much freedom she will have to fully comply with the demands of her office.

The General's Day in Court

January 26th, 2012 will be remembered as a landmark moment for justice in Guate-

the Armed Forces, couldn't claim the same. So his defense team tried the opposite tact: the terrible massacres happened, they admitted, but the general had no control over the army, nor was he aware of the massacres.

Judge Carol Patricia Flores didn't buy the argument. Judge Flores has been charged with presiding over some of the most groundbreaking human rights cases in Guatemala's history. In her ruling, she referred repeatedly to the "despicable acts" which occurred during the time of Ríos Montt's dictatorship. She cited one case in particular, that of a young indigenous girl who was bound by soldiers from head to toe in such a brutal way that... Judge Flores paused for a moment raising her hand to her mouth as if choking on the words that she was about to say.... the girl's eyes fell from their sockets. The girl died shortly thereafter.

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“These were acts so degrading and so humiliating that there can be no justification for them,” affirmed Flores. She then charged Ríos Montt with genocide and crimes against humanity and placed him under house arrest. The trial against the former dictator will begin in April.

Pérez Molina Responds

Unfortunately, the new president wasted no time in making his opinion known. While saying that he would “respect what the courts and tribunals have to say,” Otto Pérez Molina singlehandedly rejected all evidence to the contrary and proclaimed: “There was no genocide here.”

So we return to question: What will justice look like during the next four years? Based on the first two weeks of the new administration, the outlook isn’t particularly hopeful. While the Ríos Montt trial is an enormous step forward, other major human rights cases are stuck in legal limbo. The case of Efraín Bámaca (a guerilla leader who was disappeared, tortured, and assassinated by army officials) has been blocked by a series of dubious legal maneuvers. Threats and attacks on public officials attempting to carry out arrest warrants have become all too common. Frivolous lawsuits against human rights defenders are part of the troubling trend of the criminalization of activists, journalists, and community leaders.

One final risk to justice in Guatemala is the existence of a coordinated campaign pushing for a general amnesty along the lines of Argentina’s highly controversial “Ley de Punto Final” or “Full Stop Law” that would pardon those responsible for torture, murder, genocide, and other war crimes. This law would be the legal equivalent of “let bygones be bygones” and would serve as an obstacle to truth, reconciliation, and justice for the victims of the armed conflict.

President Otto Pérez Molina and his Patriot Party promise that, in their ever-present slogan, “A change is coming.” What that change represents for justice in Guatemala is a question that only time will answer.

Ríos Montt Charged with Genocide and Crimes against Humanity

On January 26, after a hearing that lasted all day, Judge Patricia Flores announced that former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt would be charged with genocide and crimes against humanity, an historic step in a decade-long quest for justice for egregious crimes committed in the early 1980s. Ríos Montt, who took power in a military coup in March 1982, oversaw a brutal scorched earth policy in Guatemala’s indigenous highland regions.

The charges identify Ríos Montt as the intellectual author of the crimes committed by armed forces in 1982-83 in Guatemala’s Ixil Triangle in the department of El Quiché: the forced displacement of 29,000, the deaths of 1,771 individuals in 11 massacres, as well as torture and 1,485 acts of sexual violence against women.

The decision to try Ríos Montt is based on his command responsibility: as leader of the military high command, he “authorized, created, designed and supervised” the military’s counterinsurgency strategy. Furthermore, the state policy of violence was carried out against a specific ethnic group, the Ixil Maya, declaring them internal enemies that needed to be “destroyed”, which constituted genocide.

Guatemala’s strict chain of command and participation of top government officials in military activity was demonstrated with declassified Guatemalan and US documents including military strategy plans *Operación Sofía*, *Plan Victoria ’82* and *Plan Firmenza ’83*. This was only possible because of years of advocacy by national and international organizations in-

cluding GHRC to gain access to evidence of the military’s strategy and patterns of abuse.

Ríos Montt has been a member of Congress since 2007 and under Guatemalan law was immune from any prosecution. However, when his term ended on January 14, 2012, he was promptly subpoenaed. Judge Flores also ordered that Ríos Montt be placed under house arrest and post a bond of Q500,000 (about \$64,000).

It will be important for the Public Prosecutor’s Office to follow through with the genocide case and the charges against Ríos Montt, and for the President to provide strong support for a transparent and independent judicial process. Doubts have been raised about the current administrations political will to move key cases forward; President Otto Pérez Molina was a Major during Ríos Montt’s regime, and was in a command position in the Ixil Triangle where the genocide was carried out. In response to the case, the president stated that he would respect the court’s decision, but that personally he did not believe that genocide was committed in Guatemala.

For communities who were victims of the genocide, this case is an important step in their search for truth, historical memory, and to guarantee that these acts are never repeated. Justice, for many communities, is a first – and necessary – step to begin to heal from the past.

Volunteer or Intern with GHRC!

Interested in getting more involved with the Guatemala Human Rights Commission? Let us know! Whether it is in our DC office or from afar, there are many opportunities to help out. We are accepting applications for summer interns, volunteer translators (must be fluent in Spanish), and passionate activists who would like to help educate or fundraise in their own community.

New Administration to Focus on Fighting Organized Crime

President Otto Pérez Molina's new administration has been vociferous in proclaiming that its biggest threats to national security are drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and organized crime networks. The president's proposed solution is an "iron fist" strategy which seemed to appeal to many Guatemalans' fed up with extremely high rates of violent crime. In his inaugural address, Pérez Molina promised to "show results" in the first six months of his presidency and "cut the murder rate by half by the end of his term."

However, Pérez Molina backed by the multi-million dollar security partnership from the US government is focusing on military solutions. Meanwhile all evidence has shown this to be a faulty strategy that fuels more violence than it prevents, and is unlikely to reduce corruption or dismantle the parallel power structures within the government.

Organized Crime in Guatemala

There is no doubt that DTOs pose a serious and urgent threat to Guatemalan citizen security and rule of law. The groups control vast sections of Guatemala's territory and have influence throughout local and national political offices, law enforcement and the military, and their violent tactics (and expansive weapons arsenal) have been a key contributor to both Guatemala's high murder rate and its embarrassing impunity rate. In the past four years, more than 24,000 Guatemalans have been murdered, giving the country an average homicide rate of 43 deaths per 100,000 citizens. (As a point of comparison, in the Iraqi city of Mosul, the most violent in the Middle East, the rate is 35 per 100,000 people.)

Guatemala has been particularly vulnerable to the influx of organized crime and drug trafficking for several reasons. A weak government, judicial system and police force make the country an easy target for corruption, recruitment, and intimidation by powerful organized crime groups. Guatemalan authorities have stated that 40 to 60 percent of the country's territory may be under the effective control of drug traffickers, and govern-

ment employees confess that they have to request permission from drug lords to be able to work in certain areas controlled by the "narcos." Clandestine airstrips in northern jungle regions, remnants from the internal conflict, have historically provided traffickers with an easy way to move their product. Coordination between crime groups and security forces has allowed free movement of drugs and people throughout the country, even through military and police check points.

There is also evidence that Guatemala is evolving beyond its traditional role as a transport zone and warehouse for South American cocaine to that of a producer of synthetic drugs. In the past year, an unprecedented amount of "precursor" chemicals have been confiscated, proof of the growing presence of meth labs in the country.

Interestingly, Pérez Molina recently joined Mexican president Calderón and Colombian president Santos in expressing support for decriminalization of drug use, a proposal he will soon take to other Central American leaders.

Kaibiles versus Zetas?

After his election, Pérez Molina immediately called on the army to "neutralize illegal armed groups by means of military power," and one of his first announcements as President was his plan to increase the use of the Kaibiles in combating organized crime. The Kaibiles, the elite special forces unit, are notorious for their intense training program and historic responsibility for some of the most horrific human rights abuses committed during the internal armed conflict. (Four former Kaibil soldiers were recently condemned to 6,060 years of prison each for their participation in the massacre of over 200 in the village of Dos Erres in 1982.)

Equally troubling is the fact that the most



"New Kaibil Course" Cartoon from enclavedefo.blogspot.com

vicious of the drug cartels currently operating in Guatemala, Los Zetas, actively recruits graduates of the Kaibil school. An army spokesperson recently confessed: "We've counted about 14 or 16 former Kaibiles who have been arrested and linked to organized crime. But you have to keep in mind that once they leave the army we no longer have any control over them."

US Involvement

Militarizing the "war on drugs" has been the US government's justification for bulking up security and military operations in Latin America. As the US has poured over \$9 billion dollars into failed crime fighting efforts in Mexico and Colombia, DTOs have increased operations in Central America, a region with fewer resources with which to combat drug trafficking and related crime. Meanwhile, key factors in the drug trade – US consumption and the illegal arms flow of US weapons to Mexico – continue with no serious attempts by policy-makers to address these issues.

President Pérez Molina has asked the United States to support his harsh tactics to crack down on organized crime, expressing his intentions to push for the lifting of the current partial ban on US aid to the Guatemalan army. Despite the ban, the US Department of Defense and other agencies are already heavily involved in Guatemala's security strategy and training of Guatemalan forces.

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International Organizations Call on Pérez Molina to Protect Human Rights

In a letter delivered by GHRC to Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina last week, thirty-eight international organizations expressed concern regarding human rights violations committed on an ongoing basis in Guatemala and called on the new administration to take concrete actions to guarantee the human rights, safety and well-being of all Guatemalans. The signers included organizations based in Guatemala, Canada, Mexico, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden and Australia.

"We hope that the promotion of human rights and the protection of the most vulnerable populations are central policies in the government's plans to improve Guatemalans' security and quality of life," the letter reads.

In addition to generalized violence, the letter specifically addressed concern about the increase in attacks against human rights defenders. It also urged the government to prevent violent evictions, which in the past few years have left numerous dead and hundreds of families without land, homes or food security and

respect international conventions requiring informed, prior consent from indigenous peoples before any resources are exploited on their lands.

"We hope that the promotion of human rights and the protection of the most vulnerable populations are central policies in the government's plans to improve Guatemalans' security and quality of life."

The signatories voiced their strong support for Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz and the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in their efforts to combat impunity. Emphasizing the importance of support for victims of the internal armed conflict and the prosecution of those responsible for crimes against humanity, the letter reiterated the need to carry through with key cases from the internal conflict, and stated:

"We trust that your administration will prioritize comprehensive implementation of the Peace Accords, will support efforts for the recuperation of historic memory, and will promote policies that respect and

defend Guatemala's multicultural and multi-ethnic citizenry, particularly indigenous peoples." Organizations also denounced the move

by the President to exclude civil society from the election of the Presidential Women's Secretariat.

While recognizing the complexity of Guatemala's security situation, the organizations expressed concern over the use of the military in citizen security initiatives. The letter encouraged solutions to organized crime and violence that focus on prevention, strengthen the police, the judiciary and the Public Prosecutor's office. The signatories have promised to continue to monitor the situation and invited the new administration to engage in dialogue with human rights groups about these issues.

New Administration to Focus on Organized Crime

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The Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) was initially created in 2007 as part of the Mérida Initiative, an agreement between the US and Mexico to fight organized crime, with the aim of "disrupting the flow of narcotics, drugs, weapons and bulk cash generated by illicit drug sales...and providing a safer and more secure region where criminal organizations no longer wield the power to destabilize governments."

Since 2008, the US has provided Central America with \$361 million through Mérida and CARSI and will likely allocate \$100 million for 2012, \$55 million of which would go to fund projects in Guatemala. In 2012, much of CARSI-designated funds will like go through the System for Central American Integration (SICA), a regional body that unfortunately lacks transparency in how funds

are spent and which has done little consultation with civil society organizations.

What's Next?

By centering the fight against organized crime on the Kaibiles – fighting fire with fire – Guatemala is mimicking a strategy that has left over 40,000 dead in Mexico over the last five years. Indigenous communities and human rights groups also have expressed their concern over sending the Special Forces back into regions which suffered so greatly at their hand only a few decades before. The Kaibiles will join thousands of army personnel in providing security. The new administration has also announced an expansion of military checkpoints, on the nation's highways which may or may not be run jointly with the police.

However, combating violence and organized crime are two separate issues – and criminal networks are not Guatemala's only challenge. Gearing up for a war on DTOs will overshadow other, equally pressing problems – such as poverty, hunger, lack of access to health, education, and land – and may end up increasing violence and human rights violations.

In response, GHRC and partner organizations continue to monitor militarization in Guatemala and neighboring countries, and seek to support alternative solutions to combating violence and criminal activity including the strengthening of civil institutions, a focus on prevention, and the dismantling of criminal networks through judicial prosecutions.

Political Appointments Favor Military and Corporate Interests

Pérez Molina's ascent to the presidency has placed the armed forces front and center in government. Those appointed to run important ministries do not stand out for exemplary record of public service, but rather seem to have been chosen for their loyalty to Pérez Molina, both from his days in the Special Forces and in military intelligence; as well as to the private sector and corporate interests.

Military and former military now run Gua-

temala's equivalents of the Department of Homeland Security and Secret Service, the Defense Department, the National Civilian Police and the National Security Council – which coordinates and supervises all institutions responsible for security. All, except Defense, are civil institutions.

The new face of the Secretariat of Peace, the office charged with overseeing the implementation of the Peace Accords, is Antonio Arenales Forno who served as

Ambassador to the US under Portillo (now facing extradition to the US for money laundering and embezzlement) and ardent supporter of Ríos Montt (now on trial for genocide).

The brother of an oil executive now oversees mining and drilling licenses and a textile and *maquila* baron oversees economic development.

Here's a deeper look at four.

Interior Minister: Mauricio Lopez Bonilla

As Interior Minister, Lopez Bonilla will oversee the National Civilian Police, the penitentiary system, immigration and border patrol, and civil intelligence gathering.

A Retired Lieutenant Colonel and graduate of the Kaibil School, Lopez Bonilla is known as a military man with a love for politics. In

1981 he led "Operation Xibalba," one of the largest military offenses during the conflict. In 1982, he was a member of the 6-member Junta Advisory Group which overthrew General Lucas Garcia. Under Ríos Montt, he was assigned the task of defending the military government against constant accusations of human rights violations. He worked with Pérez Molina as a member of the Military Joint Chiefs of Staff and in 2011 he served as Pérez Molina's campaign manager. He has been working closely with the Minister of Defense to "recuperate, defend and secure territory."



Photo: Laprensa.hn

Minister of Defense - Ulises Noe Anzueto Giron

As Defense Minister, Anzueto Giron will oversee President Pérez Molina's plan to increase the military's involvement in citizen security, and to use the Kaibiles to fight organized crime.

A former Director of the Kaibil School, Anzueto Giron served in the Guatemalan Army for the last 31 years, the majority of his career as a parachutist or Special Forces officer. In 1992, he oversaw operations in the military base in San Marcos that has been identified as the location where ex-guerrilla Commander "Everardo" Efraín Bámaca was tortured. He one of nine military officials included in the 1995 criminal case of Bámaca's torture and extrajudicial execution. He was promoted to General as he took his post as Defense Minister.



Photo: Daylife.com

Secretary of Strategic Intelligence: José María Argueta

The Secretariat of Strategic Intelligence is in charge of strategic analysis and identifying threats to assist the President in decision-making.

Secretary Argueta has strong ties to the military, and is former director of the Center for Strategic Studies for National Stability (ESTNA), which worked to blend civil and military spheres. He is currently the Vice-President of International Affairs for the Inter-Ocean Corridor of Guatemala, also known as the Dry Corridor. The Corridor is a \$7 billion project which will connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by highway, rail and pipeline. The process of obtaining rights to the land where it would be constructed is underway. The Corridor would take up about 3% of the land in Guatemala and has been described as essentially a "private bridge." President Pérez Molina has announced that the construction of the Corridor is his infrastructure priority, but many fear that it will lead to further mass evictions and conflicts over land.



Photo: elperiodico.com

Minister of Energy and Mines: Erick Archila Dehesa



Photo: elperiodico.com

As Minister of Energy and Mines, Archila will oversee Guatemala's use and management of natural resources. He plans to encourage investment in petroleum and renewable resources, and will be in charge of granting exploration and extraction licenses. Conflict around extractive industries and mining projects have caused ongoing human rights violations.

A businessman with strong ties to media and extractive industries, Archila has no direct experience in government, nor professional expertise in issues related to the extractive industry. Archila himself was the owner, until recently, of cable station Canal Antigua and. His brother Alejandro (Alex) Archila is the Vice President of Planning and Portfolio Management of the world's largest "diversified resources" company, BHP Billiton, which operates metal, diamond, oil, and coal (among other) projects in 25 countries around the world. Until 2008, BHP owned a portion of the HudBay nickel mining project in El Estor, Izabal. The private security of the company has been accused in Canadian courts of involvement in gang rape and murder.

New Report Reiterates Marlin Mine's Risk to Guatemala

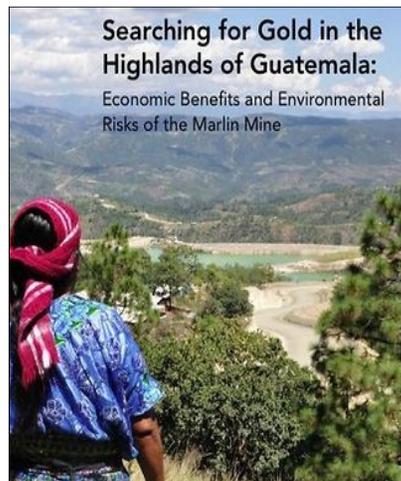
“When juxtaposed against the long-term and uncertain environmental risk, the economic benefits of the [Marlin] mine to Guatemala and especially to the local communities...are meager and short-lived.”

This conclusion was one of the main findings of a report presented in October 2011, by Luby Zarsky and Leonardo Stanley on the economic benefits and environmental risks of the Marlin Mine, which is located in Guatemala's far northeastern department of San Marcos. The mine has received a great deal of international attention, thanks largely to courageous opposition from residents in nearby communities despite violent repression and deadly retaliation.

The authors of the report, *Searching for Gold in the Highlands of Guatemala*, write that “little if any of the economic benefits of the Marlin mine have been applied toward productive investment in building sustainable industries that could generate income after mining closure.” The mine is expected to have a productive life of about 10-15 years, which means that the economic benefits of the mine will be very short lived. Local governments, meanwhile, legally receive only one half of one percent of the mine's earnings; even less reaches the communities.

The environmental costs on the other hand will last much longer. According to the report, acid mine drainage of highly toxic metals into water sources can last centuries or even millennia. Already, residents near the mine have reported skin rashes, respiratory ailments and sick cattle, as well as damages to buildings from blasting. Guatemala has very poor environmental monitoring and regulation and has done little to assess or reduce the impact of the mine on local communities, leaving Goldcorp to regulate itself. Unfortunately, though it tries to market itself as a responsible company “Goldcorp's record of environmental compliance, monitoring and disclosure has been found to be below par.”

Considering Guatemala's extreme vulnerability to climate change and earthquakes,



as well as Goldcorp's lack of a plan for mine closure and remediation, the environmental risks of the mine are extremely high. According to the authors, “the long-term impact of Marlin will be to impoverish and to impose high health risks on the local communities surrounding the mine – even without taking into account a range of other cultural and social costs, including the destructive impacts of intense conflict on the social fabric.”

Zarsky and Stanley do not downplay the economic benefits of the mine. Gold and silver prices have shot up over the last few years and production costs for the Marlin Mine are relatively low, meaning huge profits for shareholders of Goldcorp, the company who owns the mine. From 2000-2010 the value of Goldcorp's stock rose by over 1,400 percent.

However, the report shows that even though in 2010 the Marlin Mine was the single largest taxpayer in Guatemala, local communities do not reap the rewards of the mine. Since 1997, royalties paid by mining company have been at 1%, the lowest in Latin America. Overall, the Guatemalan government receives about 15% of the mine's earnings in the form of royalties and taxes. (This, however, is set to increase, after Guatemala's Association of Extractive Industries signed a voluntary agreement to pay up to 5% royalties.)

The mine has also become a cautionary example for communities in opposition to large-scale extractive industry projects. Numerous municipalities in the neighboring department of Huehuetenango have held community referendums in which citizens voted overwhelmingly against mining projects, and have declared “mine-free zones.” Nonetheless, There are currently 117 permits for mineral exploration. Reform of the mining law continues to be debated in Congress.

In San Marcos, however, years of activism – and documented negative environmental and health impacts – have not managed to deter mining giant GoldCorp, which runs the Marlin Mine. In 2005, a referendum was held in which the local population overwhelmingly rejected its existence. Since then, there have been widespread protests against the mine and a petition was sent to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). In 2010, the IACHR requested that the Guatemalan government suspend mining operations, but rescinded the request in December 2011.

Residents have already seen the destruction and illness the mine brings as well as the lack of local development. They did not need economists from the US to point out these facts of their life. Nonetheless, the report can help sway the tide of international opinion away from the irresponsible and unsustainable mining project and lend support to the surrounding communities fighting for their health, land, and the wellbeing of their families.



Protest in Vancouver, British Columbia denounces GoldCorp's mining practices in Sipakapa, San Marcos. [Mimundo.org]

Voiceless Speak Grant Recipient Advocates for Justice

For Marvyn Pérez, the recent decision to bring charges against Efraín Ríos Montt is especially poignant. He himself was a victim of Ríos Montt's brutally repressive regime and has spent his life denouncing the violence of the internal armed conflict and any moves toward impunity for the perpetrators.

Marvyn was born in Guatemala City to parents who were manual laborers. He says that despite his family's poverty he had a childhood that was "normal." In the early 1980's, even though Marvyn was still a child, he joined his older sisters in the student movement. The student's demands were basic: education, and school supplies in the classrooms. But this was a time when any demands were seen as subversive. In addition, this was just a year after the burning of the Spanish Embassy, in which 36 peasants died protesting the government's repression, and the student movement had developed a close relationship with the peasant and worker's movements. The government, therefore, saw them as a threat.

no longer police. They were uniformed soldiers with disturbing amounts of information about the students, demanding that they identify people in huge books of photos.

After four days, Marvyn was taken out of the Department of Technical Investigation. He was handcuffed, blindfolded and taken to another place, a house, where "everything changed." He could hear the crying and screams of other prisoners. He was stripped naked, his hands and feet were bound and he was thrown on the ground where he shivered with cold and fear. They asked him about the guerilla movement. Where were the guns? What were they going to do next? Punches gave way to physical torture. He was burnt with cigarettes, given electrical shocks, kicked and punched mercilessly. Denied food and water, he was left cold and starving. He was 14 years old.

Marvyn was released 12 days after being pulled off the bus. His parents hid him and his sisters with relatives on Guatemala's south coast as his mother



Marvyn Pérez

Not long after arriving in the US, Marvyn was contacted by the Religious Task Force about joining a tour called Children of War. Marvyn agreed to participate, not really knowing what he was signing up for. In New York, at the beginning of the tour, children and youth were brought together who had suffered in conflicts all over the world. The young Marvyn was shocked. Up to that point he had been a local activist and Guatemala has been his whole world. He had never heard of apartheid in South Africa or the conflicts in Northern Ireland or Palestine. Yet here he was meeting other young people from all these places, people his own age who had suffered like he had or worse.

He began to gain confidence and talk more openly about what had happened to him. This was his first time recounting his story in front of people his age who understood the trauma he had been through. Though the tour was exhausting – with a grueling schedule presenting in schools, churches and even prisons – it was profoundly healing. It also opened windows of understanding in the young Marvyn and a new perspective into the complexity of the world.

In the years since, Marvyn has continued to tell his story and remains committed to working for justice. He went home to Guatemala for several years, where he was again active in social movements, but has since returned to LA.

Now, he is regularly called upon by community groups to speak about Guatemala

For Marvyn, it is crucial that his and others' memories are preserved. "There can be no forgiveness, no reconciliation without justice. Such cruelty cannot go unpunished."

On May 29, 1982, Marvyn was riding on a bus with a couple of his fellow students when he heard sirens. At first they dismissed them, but then the bus stopped and police ordered the passengers to get out. They pulled Marvyn and his two friends aside, searched them and beat them, then took them to the Department of Technical Investigation of the National Police. On the way there, the youths were beat again, this time with the butts of guns.

That night the interrogation began. "Who is your family? Who are your friends? Where do you live?" They were asked over and over again. Routine, basic questions, but they were accompanied by blows and insults. More and more students arrived, some badly beaten and some not, but all said they were being asked the same basic questions. Then things changed. Their interrogators were

searched for a "coyote" to get them out of the country. A few months later they all escaped to Mexico and eventually crossed into the US by way of Tijuana. After arriving in Los Angeles, they joined other activists in organizing speaking tours and events to support refugees arriving in ever greater numbers.

Years later, trying to understand what had happened to him, Marvyn combed the newspapers for more information. He was surprised at how much had been published about the disappearance of these 16 students. Of the group, 13, including Marvyn, were released under Ríos Montt's amnesty program. One was killed trying to escape and two simply disappeared. By the end of the war in 1996, the United Nations tallied an estimated 47,000 Guatemalans who were disappeared by government forces.

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GHRC Brings Indigenous Leader Maria Choc on Midwest Speaking Tour

“I’m a Q’eqchi’ women, with little formal education. I don’t come with a theory, but to tell you what I have in my heart, and what I’ve seen with my eyes,” Maria said, speaking to packed venues in DC and across the Midwest. “I’m a victim of the violence and discrimination in Guatemala... it is hard to remember these nightmares.”

Maria Cuc Choc, GHRC’s guest speaker during a two-week tour in November 2011, discussed her work with communities in El Estor, Izabal, and the Polochic Valley. The communities have been deeply affected by national and multinational development projects and violent forced evictions.

Her emotional personal story of struggle inspired many, and challenged students to put their lives in perspective. “I want to tell you students: you live a calm life, with enough food... but that is not true for many communities, and many children are malnourished due to these injustices.”

Maria’s activism, conviction and strength grew out of her family’s persecution during the internal conflict. She did not live the worst of the war but she remembers that for much of her childhood she barely saw her father, who was forced to flee into the mountains for long periods of time and only made brief visits to the family.

Now her brother Ramiro Choc is in jail

for defending community land rights – widely recognized as a political prisoner due to his illegal detention by members of the military and the trumped up charges against him. Her brother-in-law, Adolfo Ich, was victim of a brutal murder in 2009 at the hands of the private security of the nickel mining company in El Estor.

“It isn’t easy to organize, and not easy to be in solidarity with fellow community members, because companies don’t stand by and watch; they threaten and intimidate you, a strategy from 1980s that they continue to use.”

Maria herself has suffered threats and intimidation, and is not blind to the risk she takes on. Still, she has found ways to carry out her organizing work and continues to act as emotional support for women who have been victims of sexual violence during past evictions.



Maria Choc, right, and GHRC Director Kelsey Alford-Jones speak at North Park College in Chicago, Ill.

The tour reached hundreds and stopped in Chicago, Grinnell, IA, and St. Paul, MN.

In a particularly touching conclusion to the tour at Macalester College, her nephew, and the son of Adolfo, stared back at her from the audience – a recipient of a student scholarship, his host family drove him from Wisconsin to hear Maria speak.

“Defending your rights is not easy; you have to give your life to the cause,” She told her audience. “I do it for my children.”

GHRC thanks all the volunteers and hosts that made Maria’s tour possible!

Voiceless Speak Grant Recipient Advocates for Justice

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and offers analysis on current events. He spoke on both radio and television when legendary singer Facundo Cabral was killed, and in the days before the elections, he helped inform Radio KPFK listeners about then candidate, now President Otto Pérez Molina’s dark past. In addition, he coordinates visits and events for visiting Guatemalan groups working on issues of human rights.

Marvyn also remains involved in the struggle against impunity for the crimes com-

mitted during the armed conflict. He was one of the complainants in the genocide case against Ríos Montt in Spain. When asked if he will get involved with the case against the former dictator in Guatemala, he says he’s not sure since the case is centered around the massacres in the Ixil Triangle. But he is ready to do so if called upon.

For Marvyn, it is crucial that his and others’ memories are preserved. Over the years people have told him that he has to

forgive, but he points out that none of the people responsible for the atrocities has ever asked for his forgiveness, not in any real way.

He explains: “There can be no forgiveness, no reconciliation without justice. Such cruelty cannot go unpunished.”

Read Marvyn’s analysis of recent events in Guatemala on our blog at: www.ghrcusa.wordpress.com

GHRC Supports Polochic Communities Before the IACHR

On October 26, GHRC's Rob Mercatante and Guatemalan partners, faced off against representatives of the Guatemalan Government in a working meeting of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to follow up on the status of emergency food, housing and

still stalling on the delivery of food or other aid. The government used the working meeting as an opportunity to present the findings of their census, and as many had feared, they used their flawed information as a further excuse not to offer assistance. A government representative

medical brigade which had arrived to assess the health of the children of the community, threatening to kill them if they returned.

It wasn't until a month later, in November 2011 –after intense international pressure and action by GHRC supporters – that the government finally relented and agreed to provide food aid. However, when they announced the quantities of food, the communities seriously considered rejecting the delivery as an insulting joke. It was barely enough to feed a family for a few days. In the end they accepted it out of dire need.

Recently the Guatemalan Government filed a petition with the IACHR requesting the lifting of the pre-

cautionary measures, arguing that the communities were not longer in need of support. The government has repeatedly claimed that most community members had housing and access to medical care. However, GHRC received reports that interviews were conducted by biased individuals. In fact, many community members have reported being turned away from the public health centers because of their resistance to the evictions.

With the new administration of President Pérez Molina, the members of the Polochic communities fear that even the small advances that have been made in their case will be lost. A petition in support of the communities has gathered 2460 signatures from the international community, which will be delivered to the new director of the Presidential Human Rights Office as soon as he or she is appointed.

Meanwhile, there has been no justice for the three community members who were killed during, and after, the evictions.



GHRC staff and interns with representatives of the communities of the Polochic Valley in front of the White House

security for the 14 communities evicted in the Polochic Valley in March of 2011.

Two community representatives from the Polochic Valley, Carolina Rax Tiul and Jorge Choc Ac, spoke eloquently about the immense vulnerability of the evicted families. They were accompanied by Attorneys Sergio Belteton, of the Peasant Unity Committee, and Martha Garcia.

The Inter-American Commission, an organ of the Organization of American States (OAS), can receive petitions for "precautionary measures" from individuals, communities and organizations which aim to "prevent irreparable harm" in urgent situations. In the case of the Polochic, the petition asked the Guatemalan government to guarantee life and physical integrity of the community members and provide humanitarian assistance.

Though the precautionary measures were granted in June 2011, at the time of the meeting in October, the government was

later confided that they hadn't made any effort to investigate rates of malnutrition, despite the fact that three children present during the census were visibly suffering from prolonged hunger.

As Rob and the others filed out of the meeting to debrief, messages began arriving from the Polochic. Carolina's community of Paraná had just been attacked again, and their make-shift houses burnt to the ground. As Carolina and Jorge desperately called their families to get more information and see if anyone had been hurt, the group filed back into the building of the OAS to track down the government representatives, as well as representatives of the IACHR to tell them what had happened and see what could be done.

The government representative promised, in front of the IACHR, that the displaced community members would be provided, that night, with shelter and food. Unfortunately, that support never given. Instead, the local police chased off members of a

Commemoration of the Dos Erres Massacre

This past December, GHRC was proud to accompany FAMDEGUA (Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Guatemala) and to stand in solidarity with the families of the victims as they commemorated the 29th anniversary of the Dos Erres massacre.

Nearly three decades have passed since Guatemalan army elite forces killed more than 250 community members of the small farming village of Dos Erres in Guatemala's northern Peten district. But the tears in the eyes of the surviving family members served as proof that the grief and loss were as real today as on that tragic day in 1982.

For the younger generation it was their first opportunity to visit the large white cross that marks the spot where the well once stood. For others, who had managed to escape the massacre, it was their first time returning to the place where their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and children had been brutally murdered.

The children were the first to die. Their skulls were crushed by sledgehammers or smashed against trees, and their lifeless bodies were tossed into the village well. The young girls and women were raped, and the pregnant women were beaten until their babies were aborted. One by one, men, women and the elderly were viciously attacked: some beaten with sledgehammers, others shot. Their bodies, too, were dumped into the depths of the well.

Later, as the soldiers shoveled dirt into the well, they could hear the cries of anguish of those who hadn't yet died from their injuries.



The massacre erased Dos Erres from the face of the earth. In order to visit the memorial site where the village once stood, special permission has to be obtained from the "finquero" (plantation owner) who now holds title to the property.

Said one surviving family member: "It breaks my heart that I have to ask permission to visit the land that was once my home - the land where the blood of my family was spilled."



Fragment from "Thoughts on the Real History of Dos Erres"

By Pedro Antonio Montepeque Galicia, a survivor

The families were working the land
Unaware that the end of their days
Was slowly approaching.

In December of 1982
The families thought only of planting
They had no idea that this year
There would be no harvest.

At the year's end
Darkness arrived at this place
It was a Tuesday

The earth that yielded our daily bread
On that day was fertilized
With the blood of innocent people
Our loved ones

They broke our dreams
Of community and development
Fear is what they left us
There would be no more harvests.

Human Rights Update

September 26: **Guatemala Requests Temporary Protected Status from the US** The request is based on the natural disasters in 2010 and 2011.

September 28: **Congress Approves Law Against Femicide** The Guatemalan Congress approved resolution 4-2011, which will urge State institutions to act with the greatest speed and due diligence in cases of femicide.

October 31: **Oscar Mejia Victores Declared Too Sick to Stand Trial** The former dictator, who ruled Guatemala from 1983-86 was deemed incapable of standing trial for genocide and war crimes due to a stroke. His case has been suspended and will resume if and when his health improves.

November 7: **Otto Pérez Molina Elected President** The retired general and founder of the Patriot Party won the second round of presidential elections with 54% of the popular vote

November 9: **Pérez Molina Announces Use of Kaibiles in the War on Drugs** The President-elect announced plans to use Guatemala's elite Special Forces unit, the Kaibiles, in the fight against narco-trafficking.

November 16: **President Colom Confirms Extradition of Alfonso Portillo** President Alvaro Colom confirmed the extradition of former president Alfonso Portillo to the United States on charges of money laundering during his time in office.

November 16: **US Chief of Southern Command Visits Guatemala** South-COM Chief General Douglas M. Fraser, visited and met with President-elect Pérez Molina. The two discussed plans to improve intelligence services, special forces, paratroopers, kaibiles, the National Civil Police and bolster radar capabilities in the fight against narco-trafficking.

November 30: **Military Widows Demand Investigation of Guerrilla Members** The Association of Military Widows demanded the investigation into over 30

supposed guerilla members for crimes against humanity and terrorism. Among the accused are Enrique Paz y Paz and Laura Paz y Paz—father and aunt to Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz.

December 6: **National Police Archives to be made available on-line.** Millions of documents from the Guatemalan national police archives will be made publicly available online. The documents contain valuable information on torture, forced disappearances and violence during Guatemala's armed conflict.

December 14: **Guatemalan and American Human Rights Defenders named in case of Assassinations.** Theodore Michael Plochanski accused 52 people of involvement in kidnapping, torture and assassination of eight diplomats between 1960-1988. The list includes Guatemalan and US human rights activists, journalists, family members of Attorney General Paz y Paz and former first lady Sandra Torres.

December 15: **Five Charged for Massacre in Plan de Sanchez** The charges, brought against an army officer and four former members of the Civil Patrol, stem from the massacre of 256 civilians in 1982 in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.

December 31: **US Consolidated Appropriations Act Signed** The Act leaves in place the partial ban on US aid to the Guatemalan army, recommends funding for police reform in Guatemala and CICIG and directs the Secretary to State to produce a report on how the US is supporting female victims of violence in Guatemala.

January 10: **US HHS Offers Aid over Guatemalan STD lawsuit.** The Department of Health and Human Services announced \$1.8 million in aid to health initiatives in Guatemala. Meanwhile, the US has claimed the government officials cannot be held legally responsible for damages caused by the deliberate infection of Guatemalans in the 1940s with gonorrhea and syphilis.

January 13: **Three Alleged Ex-Guerrillas Accused of Massacre** The

complaint, brought by the Mutual Support Group against three Guatemalans including Pedro Palma Lau, who until the 14th of January was a member of Congress with the President's Patriot Party, stems from a massacre committed in 1988 in the community of El Aguacate, San Andrés Itzapa.

January 19: **Prosecutor's Office Requests that Charges be Dropped Against the President in Bámaca Case** The request is based on one expert's testimony claiming that Pérez Molina was not in the chain of command responsible for the torture and assassination of Efraín Bámaca. The testimony is contradicted by various documents declassified by the US and Guatemalan governments.

January 24: **Pérez Molina Announces Special Police Force to Combat Femicide** The aim of the force is to reduce the number of femicides by 25% within the span of one year.

January 26: **Former General Efraín Ríos Montt, Charged with Genocide and War Crimes**, held under house arrest.

January 26: **Guatemalan Congress Ratifies Rome Statute** After decades of pressure from human rights groups, Guatemala has signed the treaty, which allows for victim participation in proceedings at the International Criminal Court.

February 3 **Arrest Warrants Issued for 21 Ex-Kaibiles for Massacre in Dos Erres** Meanwhile, the alleged leader of the troop accused of killing 201 people in 1982, remains in jail in Canada awaiting a decision regarding his extradition.

February 10 **Seven sentenced for kidnapping and murder of Lisandro Guarcax** Seven members of the gang Los Pujujiles were sentenced to between 100 and 376 years in prison each for kidnapping 34 people and killing 6 of those whose families couldn't pay the price they demanded. Mayan artist and teacher Lisandro Guarcax was among the victims.

EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Host a Speaker with GHRC this April

Do you live in Washington, Oregon or California? Are you looking for ways to support human rights in Guatemala?

Host **Iduvina Hernandez**, Guatemalan journalist and human rights activist to speak at your school, place of worship, or other venue, starting April 23. Iduvina will discuss **Militarization and Threats to Justice in Guatemala**.

Email ghrc-usa@ghrc-usa.org for more information.



GHRC is Celebrating its 30th Anniversary!

2012 marks 30 years since Sister Alice Zachmann registered the Guatemala Human Rights Commission as a non-profit, and we're celebrating all year. Watch for tidbits about GHRC's history on Facebook and stay tuned for information about how you can get involved in celebrating this milestone. Mark your calendars for a special event in Washington, DC on September 27th.

Connect with GHRC

Here at GHRC, we're always looking for new ways to educate and mobilize. There are all sorts of ways to connect with us online: Like us on Facebook; follow us on Twitter; and check out our new blog at www.ghrcusa.wordpress.com. Sign up on our listserv to receive regular news and updates. Finally we're excited to announce the imminent launch of our new website at www.ghrc-usa.org. Prefer not to use the internet? Don't worry. GHRC will still be sending out *El Quetzal* and other updates by mail.

Apply For GHRC's Voiceless Speak Fund

Since 1987, the Voiceless Speak Fund has empowered Guatemalans with personal knowledge of human rights violations in Guatemala to share their experiences and raise awareness among people in the United States. The Fund provides direct assistance to Guatemalans in the US who are in financial need and are engaged in Guatemala human rights work, or have demonstrated an ability and desire to do such work. For more information, visit our website. Applications are due June 30, 2012.



Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

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