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Rural Women's Network Leader Attacked and Robbed

In the past few months, Juana Bacá Velasco, the mother of three daughters and pregnant with her fourth child, has been repeatedly attacked and threatened in her town of Nebaj, department of K'iche'. Juana is a director of the Ixhil Women's Network (Red de Mujeres Ixhiles, or RMI), which provides support for more than 350 women in nine rural Mayan communities in Nebaj. The organization, founded in 2003, is dedicated to rural development and the participation and empowerment of Mayan women, and provides support and accompaniment for women who are victims of violence.

Juana says that the mayor of her village,

"These actions are meant to create a state of fear and terror, so that we will abandon our work with the RMI"

- Juana Bacá Velasco, Ixhil Women's Network

Virgilio Geronimo Bernal Guzman, has orchestrated the attacks. "He considers RMI and our directorate of women to be

his rival for control of the development projects and administering the budget for those projects," Juana explains.

The RMI has been targeted for the past five years, she says, ever since the women organized to participate in a US\$125,000 project for rural development. "The mayor heard about the project and our organization, and wanted to control the funds," Juana says.

Juana was attacked in the town hall of Nebaj on March 30, 2009 and spent the next two days and nights in the hospital. Three local women beat, kicked, and punched her, throwing her down the steps. Her husband intervened to rescue her and is now accused of assaulting the assailants. "The women work for the mayor," Juana charges. "He is behind the attacks. I almost lost my baby."

On July 3, at 7 p.m., Juana was targeted again. She was walking in the street when the mayor's car stopped to focus its headlights on her, while six bullets were shot into the air. The car sped off. Juana called the police but no one answered.

On July 6, Juana received a threatening phone call from a man demanding money not to kill her. He said he was hired by the town council but was willing to negotiate a price for her life.

Most recently, her house was raided. "Luckily, no one was home, or they would have beaten us, killed us, or dragged us off to jail," Juana says.



Juana Bacá Velasco

Other RMI women leaders and their families also have been threatened with extortion; unidentified men have called, demanding US\$3,000 to not hurt the children. In August 2009, six men attacked the 13-year-old son of one of the RMI leaders in a cornfield in Nebaj. The men

Continued on Page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

Delegations to Guatemala.....	3	Human Rights UPDATE.....	8
Forced into Exile.....	4	CAFTA's Impact on Medicine.....	9
Voiceless Speak Recipients	6	Calendar of Events.....	9
Community Radio Important in Rural Communities...7		Donor Acknowledgements.....	10
Postville Deportees Pursue Legal Case.....	7	Fiscal Year Financial Summary.....	11

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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Women's Leader Attacked

Continued from page 1

told the boy that they were hired to kill his parents. They demanded the phone numbers of his parents so they could extort money from them. The boy later recognized one of the men and reported him. The police have not yet investigated the matter.

"These actions are meant to create a state of fear and terror," Juana explains, "so that we

"I am tired of this process, but I don't want the mayor to win. His thugs raided my house; luckily, no one was home, or they would have beaten us, killed us, or dragged us off to jail"

—Juana Bacá Velasco

will abandon our work with the RMI. We don't have access to justice because we lack the economic and political power to intervene. The mayor has manipulated the evidence, stopped the investigations, and bought off the judge. The cases are dismissed for lack of merit."

The hardships of her struggle have been formidable, says Juana. "My daughters are 14, seven, and one and a half years old. I receive state security protection (an armed police guard) but there are only three of us out of 364 RMI members who are in this protection program. Meanwhile, our families and colleagues are targeted for threats and attacks. I pay the guard's food, lodging, and travel whenever we leave Nebaj."

According to Juana, the mayor is trying to destroy the RMI by dividing the women and pitting them against each other based on rumors. The RMI does not have the money to continue paying a lawyer in the battle against the mayor. The women are exhausted and need economic and psychosocial support to continue with their work, Juana explains during a meeting with GHRC's director.

There is an open investigation against the mayor of Nebaj in the court system in Chimaltenango, but it has been paralyzed because the original file was "lost".

Juana, now eight months pregnant, has already participated in six hearings, traveling five hours on a public bus each way. "I am tired of this process," she says. "But I don't want the mayor to win."

GHRC is closely following this case and has made a formal request to the Guatemalan Supreme Court, the International Commission Against Impunity, and the President's Commission on Human Rights for:

*Increased security measures for an additional three leaders of the RMI and their families;

*The appointment of a new judge in Nebaj in order to guarantee a fair trial for Juana and the RMI women;

*An improved system for reporting human rights violations in Nebaj, with a local office for reporting and investigating threats and attacks.

Guatemala is the most dangerous country in Central America for human rights workers. From January through August of 2009, Guatemalan human rights defenders suffered 257 attacks, including ten murders, in comparison with 220 attacks during the same eight months of 2008. The increase in attacks is alarming and highlights the need for increased international support to demand full investigation and prosecution of these crimes and support for victims and their families.

GHRC supports the right of Guatemalan human rights workers to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Help us to support Juana's important work with the Ixhil Women's Network by making a contribution to GHRC today. We need your support to continue our collaborative work!

Delegations on Violence Against Women

Women in Guatemala face some of the highest rates of violence in the world. To understand why abuse and femicide exists in Guatemala, it is important to understand the historical, cultural and socio-political context of gender inequality, misogyny, and continued corruption and impunity.

In August 2009, 22 people from seven states traveled to Guatemala with two delegations led by GHRC, to better understand the obstacles Guatemalan women face in the home, in the public sphere, and in the legal system.

The delegates met with Guatemalan women's rights organizations in five departments, government officials, survivors of violence, families of victims, Mayan women in rural communities, and the US embassy. They learned about the history of violence from war widows, the Myrna Mack Foundation, the Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team, and the Survivor's Foundation. They spent afternoons with Mayan women (Achi, Mam, and Kakchiquel) in rural communities, in adobe homes, cooking over a wood stove together, turning the sacred corn into hot tortillas.

In Xela and Rabinal, the delegates visited a CAIMU, a government sponsored center for female survivors of violence. The majority of the staff is survivors of violence; they provide legal, psychological, medical, social, and shelter support for

victims. In Xela, the CAIMU New Horizons provides outreach programs for sex workers and women in prison. In rural Rabinal, an area desimated by the internal armed conflict, the center often deals with women who were not only victims of violence during the war, but continue to suffer at the hands of ex-military and ex-members of the civilian patrols (PACs).

"What we need are more shelters for women. They face violence every day in their homes but have nowhere to go to escape the situation. If a woman reports the violence, her partner will be taken out of the home; often he is the only source of income. She knows that her children will go hungry if she reports the crime; so she stays with the abuser, and suffers repeated violence, often resulting in death," explained Maria, a social worker with New Horizons. Unidentified armed men have threatened the New Horizons staff and threatened to burn down the building in retaliation for the progressive work being done in support of female victims.

The delegates met with two different groups of midwives who promote traditional Mayan birthing and healing practices that are not recognized by the modern health care system. "Health care is a right; 80% of the births in our region are delivered by midwives," said the CODECOT director. There are over 700 midwives working in 20 districts in Quetzaltenango. "We now have a midwifery school with a two year course including traditional and technical midwife skills, mental health, political, civic, and organizing skills. The

older midwives are the teachers," she explained.

Violence against women occurs not only



Mayan Mam women of Espunpujá, Quetzaltenango, with the Highland Women's Association.

in the home, but also in the workplace. Delegates met with members of STITCH (an NGO that brings together Central American and US women workers defending labor rights). The women banana workers organized their own union to challenge labor and economic obstacles; they face sexual harassment in the workplace and threats for speaking out. The women are paid US\$12 per day (twice minimum wage) to pack 45 boxes of bananas per hour, nine hours a day under backbreaking conditions.

Mayan women from the organization "Mama Maquin" spoke of the challenges of organizing women in rural indigenous towns, where machismo keeps women at home with the children. Mama Maquin promotes the rights of refugee women and girls through workshops, literacy programs, and actions. "I got divorced five years ago; my neighbors say I have many lovers and can't be trusted. I enjoy my freedom to work, to walk around town, and spend my earnings as I see fit," said a member of the group.

In Pacux, Baja Verapaz, the delegates were greeted by 30 Achi Mayan women with children in tow. As massacre survivors, they are no strangers to machismo



Delegates in Group 1 gather in front of the National Palace

Continued on Page 5

Detained, Tortured, and Forced Into Exile by their Fathers' Assassins

By Amanda Martin

Last May, Jerónimo, a 24 year-old father of three and two of his fellow villagers were digging in a mass grave in their rural village of Pocohil, in the department of El Quiché. They were attempting to exhume the remains of their fathers, who had been murdered during the internal armed conflict of the 1980s.

“Do you think it is possible that the people who attacked us will be put in prison?”

—Jerónimo, victim of vigilante justice

But their work alarmed former leaders of the Civil Patrol, or PAC, in the village. The PAC was a paramilitary army of approximately 800,000 rural Guatemalan men who served under forced conscription in their hometowns and villages. They fought on the government's side during the war, and committed 259 documented massacres.¹

On May 29, 2009, Jerónimo and his companions were victims of the former PAC members, who held them by force, doused them with gasoline, threatened them with incineration, and whipped them. Jerónimo and his companions narrowly escaped with their lives and their families. They are now living in fear, exile, and poverty in a distant Guatemalan city.

Jerónimo's story is one more example of the lingering hatred and bitterness from Guatemala's 36-year war that ended with the 1996 peace accords.

The 1996 law of National Reconciliation pardoned many of the crimes committed during the war (except for crimes against humanity, such as forced disappearance, genocide, and torture). Today, many victims and their families live next door to

the victimizers. Their children go to the same school, belong to the same church, and shop at the same store. Suspicion and fear remain in the communities where war crimes have gone unpunished.

This is the case in the department of Quiché, which suffered more massacres than any other during the war (68% of the total of 626).²

Among other things, the peace accords defined various projects for recovering the remains of victims and making reparations to victims' families. It was under those accords that Jerónimo and his two friends were working when they were attacked. The three had witnessed the murder of their own fathers during the conflict. In December 2008, they began the legal process of exhuming the remains in order to give their fathers a proper burial. They knew the location of the mass grave and, together with the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation and the National Council of Communities for Integrated Development, organized the exhumation.

The digging began but the bodies were missing. “We found a few finger bones, but everything else had been taken out,” Jerónimo said. “They came and stole our fathers' bones, after murdering them so long ago, in order to erase the evidence of their crimes.”

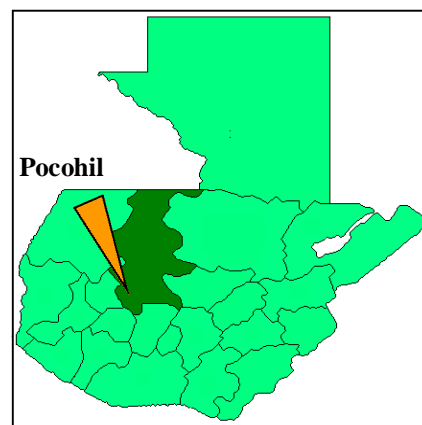
Jerónimo said that he and his two companions then went to the house of Don Diego, an evangelical pastor and former PAC leader to ask him where he had put the bones. But Diego ran out the back door to a neighbor's house. He blew the village alarm whistles and told a young man to shout “the guerrillas are here! They are sacking the church! Thieves! Come and get them!”

Five hundred villagers responded, gathering in the rain while 17 people, most of them former PAC members, declared the

three men guilty of theft and insurgency. A representative of the human rights ombudsman's office and eight national police officers stood by without intervening. Then they negotiated the release of the professional team members but abandoned Jerónimo and the others who had organized the exhumation, leaving them behind in the hands of their fathers' assassins.

Jerónimo, his two friends, and each of their wives stood in the rain until 3 a.m. The town leaders called for punishment and gave each of the three men 30 lashes. Later that night, Jerónimo they fled their Quiché village.

Now, Jerónimo, his wife Maria, and their three daughters (nine-year old twins and a four-year-old) are refugees living in exile. They currently live in a three-room cement block house in an undisclosed city in Guatemala. They sleep on a piece of cardboard on a cement floor.



Map of Guatemala: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:ElQuicheGUAT.PNG>

Their removal from their former lives has been wrenching. They left behind their land, crops, home, families, cultural identity, and sense of security. The children are no longer attending school. The families speak Quiché but are in a big city where most people speak Spanish. The exiled men earn money shining shoes for US\$3 per day, half the minimum wage.

¹Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, “Rights for All”, Vol. #17, October 23, 2003.

²REMHI report, Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory, Archdiocese Office of Human Rights, Guatemala City, 1998.

Forced in Exile

Continued from page 4

When I visited them, I watched as Leida, the four-year-old, hugged her doll. "This is the only toy I have here," she said. "My daddy got it for me. All of my toys were left behind, and all of my clothing." She smoothed out her jeans and pink t-shirt, and handed me a photo in which she is dressed in traditional K'iche' *corte* (woven wrap-around skirt) and *huipil* (hand embroidered blouse). "I don't have my clothes," she said, pulling at her jeans with disdain.

"We left everything behind when we fled for our lives," Jerónimo explained, "our pots and pans, our beds and furniture, our relatives, our newly constructed home. We can't go home because they will kill

us." Then he asked me, "Do you think it is possible that the people who attacked us will be put in prison?"

The Human Rights Defenders Unit of Guatemala (UDEFEUGA) is working with a lawyer to bring this case to justice. GHRC's director accompanied the victims during their meeting at the Public Prosecutor's office in Guatemala City, where they shared their testimony and began the long process of identifying the perpetrators.

GHRC is supporting these families through the Human Rights Defenders Relocation Program, providing rent, food, and transportation for

Vigilante justice in rural Guatemala is becoming increasingly common. Locals and experts explain this phenomenon is a result of lack of state security forces, lack of rule of law, limited access to a functioning legal system, exasperated intolerance toward perceived crimes. The accused have no chance to defend themselves, no legal representation, due process, or right to trial as guaranteed under the 1985 Constitution.

three months. Your contributions help support this program and our work to support human rights for Guatemalan people.

August Delegations

Continued from page 3

and violence. Some women are not allowed to leave their homes to participate in meetings and trainings. Yet the women of Pacux have overcome many obstacles to begin to organize in their community, and they now proudly teach their young children about gender equality.

The "Women's Sector" brought the voices of Guatemalan women to the Peace Accords process. They organized 25,000 women in a National Women's Forum to raise awareness of women's rights and build a national feminist movement in Guatemala. "Our goal was to form a diverse movement of Mayan and Ladina



Mama Maquín leaders, Ixcán

women, lesbians and heterosexuals, to educate ourselves and build a common platform," said Sandra Morán, Director. "We now have a political training school

for lesbians," she added.

At the community radio station in Xajaxáca, Sololá, delegates gave live radio interviews on violence against women to the listening audience of 8,000 Maya Kakchiquel residents. The local staff, two women and one man, run the station, offering a wide variety of bilingual programs including local, national, and international news; literacy; preventive health and vaccination information; natural disaster alerts; Mayan culture; and agricultural tips. (See more about *Community Radio* on page 7.)

The delegations ended with a meeting at the US Embassy in Guatemala City where they reported on their findings, shared their concerns, and asked for more support for programs for Guatemalan women who are victims of violence.

While the time in Guatemala is an intense, often transformative, experience for participants, it is the post-delegation actions that affect positive change for the Guatemalan people. Upon returning to the US, delegates have formed a solidarity group in Richmond, given presentations,



Delegates in Group 2 gather around Rosalina Tuyuc, founder of Conavigua

spoken on local radio stations in three states, and are planning a lobby day to support the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA), among other activities.

Violence against women and girls has escalated in the past ten years. Guatemala is now number one in cases of femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 2000-2008, 4,159 women were violently killed, 722 in 2008 alone. Since the Law Against Femicide was passed in May 2008, only three perpetrators have been sentenced under the law.

Voiceless Speak: Community Work Continues from the US

By *Voiceless Recipient Carlos Albacete*

In 1998 a group of Guatemalan ecologists formed Trópico Verde to change environmental policy. We insisted that politicians respond to the demands of the people and in doing so we faced colossal obstacles including corruption among officials, the use of force to defend the interests of powerful groups, and a postwar culture with an absence of rule of law.



Carlos Albacete and his wife, Piedad

My wife Piedad and I have co-directed the organization since its inception. Trópico Verde has worked with communities in the Petén to strengthen their voice through community referendums. The people's right to consultation with the government concerning any outside agent's use of their land now has popular support.¹ Trópico Verde supports communities in reclaiming their rights that are denied by big business and the government to strengthen democratic participation in a country absent of rule of law.

Our first battle consisted of revoking the exploration and extraction concessions that former Guatemalan President Álvaro Arzú granted to turn the forest of Petén into an immense oil field. It was a dangerous and difficult campaign. Strangers followed us, passed by our houses shooting, and for a time were under surveil-

lance from the general of the President's Military Intelligence Guard. Despite overwhelming odds, we achieved a resounding success: the Biosfera Maya Reserve was protected from the oil industry.

Trópico Verde has fought other great battles in Guatemala. We worked with Greenpeace to gain the inclusion of the mahogany tree in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) in 2002. Trópico Verde forced the government to renounce its support of Japan's proposal to lift the ban on whaling.

In 2007, Piedad and I suffered an assassination attempt, which we escaped from alive only because none of the bullets directly hit us. This attack was provoked by our outspokenness against corruption among politicians and government employees who were in favor of allowing drug trafficking to gain power in the forest of Petén. The murder attempt drove us into exile in the United States, where we live today. From here, we continue to file reports, speak out, and work to support the Guatemalan forests.

It is difficult to run an organization long distance and getting people in the US interested in Guatemala isn't easy. Yet this year, two articles were published by independent sources on our work. We strive to create public interest and gain

allies in our battle. Through persistence, Guatemala will one day become the country that the people deserve.

Volunteering for Her Community

Lily² is a Guatemalan survivor of domestic violence who immigrated to the United States in 2004 in order to save her life. She is a single mother from the capital who earned her degree in Business Administration and currently works as the manager at Chapina Bakery, a bakery that sells Guatemalan products in the DC area.

Lily began her work as an activist in Guatemala at a preventative health clinic helping low income residents of San Lucas Sacatepéquez. There she had the opportunity to visit and bring joy to abandoned children who had been born with AIDS. She was also involved in the collection of books for a library project in a women's preventative health center in Zone 18.

Currently, Lily is involved and committed to working with non-profit organizations in order to help the Latino community advance within the US system. She holds positions as the vice president of the La Union Mall Association (LUMA) and vice president/spokesperson for the Association of United Guatemalans (AGUA).

Since 1987 GHRC/USA has encouraged Guatemalans in the US speak truth to power through the Voiceless Speak program. GHRC/USA provides direct assistance to Guatemalans in the US who have suffered human rights abuses in Guatemala, are in financial need, and are engaged in Guatemala human rights work.

We would like to congratulate our 2009 recipients of the Voiceless Speak Award: Mario Ávila, Willy Barreno, Lucía Muñoz, Marvyn Pérez, Adrian Ventura

¹ The International Labor Organization's Convention #169 mandates that social, cultural, religious and spiritual values and practices of indigenous peoples be recognized and protected, and that these peoples are consulted on policies and projects that will affect their land.

² By request of the recipient, we have published only a brief account of her personal story.

Community Radio Important in Rural Communities

As the mass media becomes increasingly commercialized and consolidated, local independent news sources are struggling to survive. Community radio is a forum to express local views, share local news, and in the case of Guatemala, a way to keep traditions and languages alive.

Over 600 community radio stations in Guatemala broadcast in 15 indigenous languages.

Community radio stations in Guatemala bring news to people who rely on the radio for information on health care, vaccination campaigns, educational programming, community events announcements, emergency information on natural disasters, agricultural tips, and much more. Over 600 community radio stations in Guatemala broadcast in 15 indigenous languages, providing an alternative to commercial media, especially for rural

communities (where literacy falls well below the national level of 70%) with limited access to print media, Internet, and cable television.

In many rural areas, community radio is the only source of information available for indigenous Guatemalans who speak little Spanish. Programs on elections, community referendums, disease prevention, flood warnings, and local and national news are included in community radio programming.

Despite many promises, the legal use of radio frequencies remains inaccessible to indigenous communities in Guatemala – unless they can come up with as much as \$125,000 to bid for a license. Some 600 stations operate without licenses, many of them working out of one-room offices with donated equipment. They are subject to police raids, fines, and being shut down.

The stations and their communities have organized to obtain the operating licenses



GHRC Delegate Carmen Williams visits community radio station,

guaranteed to them under national and international law.

On August 3, over a thousand rural people made the long trip to Guatemala City to rally in support of a bill introduced to the Guatemalan Congress, the Community Media Act. If passed, it will create a National Council of Community Media to award licenses to community radio stations. GHRC supported the legislation through a grassroots sign-on letter sent to the Guatemalan government in August.

Postville Deportees Continue to Pursue Legal Case

Over a year after the raid on Postville, Iowa's Koshers meatpacking plant, a group of deported Guatemalan workers in San Miguel Dueñas seeks justice in their case. GHRC began investigating the possibilities of a legal case after our March, 2009 meeting. The deportees asked if the law had been broken in the course of their violent arrest, in the rushed and often biased legal process, and in instances of excessive force or mistreatment by US officials during the raid and subsequent detention.

The Postville raid was one of the largest in US history. The leaders of the group have been approached by countless journalists, researchers, and film makers. "In the Shadow of the Raid" will premier this October, 2009 and the feature length documentary "abUSed: The Postville Raid" is scheduled to be released in November, 2009.

Visits from the press, students, and researchers have allowed community members to talk about their experience to an international audience and help change US public opinion on migration, ICE, and the criminalization of immigrants. Yet the international attention doesn't address the enormous problems now faced by the deported workers: debt, unemployment, and the emotional after-effects of their 6-11 month imprisonment.

As community members find ways to survive through tough economic times, they are still haunted by memories of the violent raid, incarceration, family separation and deprivation of basic rights. The frustra-

tion, anger, pain, and expectation that filled the room in our March meeting (see June issue of *El Quetzal*) has been muted by the familiar feeling of inevitable abandonment by those who offer help. Yet this August, 13 deported workers present in San Miguel Dueñas expressed their will to move forward with a legal case.

GHRC is coordinating a response with lawyer Elizabeth Badger, the Refugee and Detention Project Director at the World Organization for Human Rights USA, to find a law clinic to take the case. Initial affidavits from those interested may be prepared this fall.

GHRC advocates for a just and comprehensive immigration reform, a stop to workplace raids, and humane and respectful treatment of persons in detention. Recognizing that most Guatemalans are forced to migrate due to economic conditions, GHRC calls for a renegotiation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which has had a powerful and negative influence on local sustainable economies.

Human Rights *UPDATE*

IN BRIEF

- **Violence Against Women is Rarely Investigated.** The Office of the Special Prosecutor on Women receives more than 700 reports of sexual violence monthly, most of which languish in impunity. Of the 3,401 reports received between January and May, only 68 suspected perpetrators are in protective custody. The Public Prosecutor has filed 224 arrest warrants, but 156 have yet to be served.

Despite the high number of initial reports, **victims often abandon the legal process.** On Sept. 1, *La Hora* cited that eight out of ten female victims of violence choose to drop charges against their aggressors before the cases are even sent to a trial judge, usually due to fear of retaliation or economic dependency.

- US Ambassador to Guatemala, **Stephen McFarland, names narco-trafficking and organized crime the most pressing threats.** On July 22, he stated that police forces should be the first and only to respond and that the United States must reduce demand, and the flow of arms and money.

On August 7, the **National Civil Police Director and Deputy Director were dismissed.** Porfirio Pérez Paniagua, Director of the PNC, Rolando Pérez Mendoza, deputy director, Victor de Jesus Lopez, Deputy Director of Operations, and Hector Castellanos, Assistant Director of Research, all left their posts. The Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) immediately launched an investigation against them for alleged responsibility in the theft of at least 119 kilos of cocaine. The investigation continues into 23 policemen who were at the location where the cargo was discovered.

- **U.S. Court Rejects Appeal.** On August 20, the US Court of Appeals rejected the asylum appeal of seven Guatemalan trade unionists, arguing that there was a lack of jurisdiction in their case against three banana companies. The asylum seekers claimed that Guatemala is not safe for them and that Guatemalan courts are corrupt and unfit to hear the case. The Court of Appeals in Georgia rejected the claim, however. The unionists sued the companies Del Monte Fresh Produce, Inc., Del Monte Fresh Produce Company and Bandegua. The charges listed are arbitrary detention, crimes against humanity and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

RECENT HEADLINES

- June 1: **Dos Erres massacre case in Inter.-American Court.** Sixteen military officials are accused for the massacre of 250 people in Peten. The hearing was held in Bolivia.

- July 15: **Residents of 12 communities in San Juan Sacatepéquez protest cement company.** Over 5,000 people marched 22 miles to Guatemala City to protest environmental contamination and their right to community consultation and referendums.

- July 15: **Salvador Gándara resigns as Minister of the Interior.** He was replaced by Raúl Velásquez, former Deputy Minister of Community Support.

- July 24: **Man sentenced to 40 years in prison for femicide.** Cristóbal Aldana Archila, 48 years old, was sentenced in Alta Verapaz to 40 years in prison. This is the first femicide conviction for that region.

- July 24: **Norma Cruz finishes a ten day hunger strike** for birth mother's rights against illegal adoptions of Guatemalan babies. The Trafficking Department of the Prosecutors Office established that three girls had been illegally adopted by families residing in Illinois, Louisiana and Iowa. They left Guatemala with false names. Two men were arrested and charged with abduction, plagiarism, and human trafficking.

- July 31: **Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources issues new resolutions on the importation of sodium cyanide** by the mining company Montana Exploradora. The agency is requiring Montana to pay its US\$1.5 million debt to the Guatemalan government in order to import more cyanide and demands that the company obtain an import license and pay 28 cents (US) for every pound of cyanide imported.

- August 2: **Chuarrancho population votes against dam.** 82.7% of the population of Chuarrancho, in the department of Guatemala, voted in a referendum on Saturday against the construction of a dam on the Motagua River because of its possible negative impact on their communities and access to water.

- August 4: **Possible reparations for the communities affected by the Chixoy Dam.** President Colom proposes to institutionalize a program for reparations for the 33 communities affected by the construction of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Dam of Alta Verapaz. At least 444 people were massacred in the village of Río Negro and thousands more have suffered violations of their fundamental rights for nearly 30 years, since the electric generator was built.

- August 12: **Drought causes increased hunger and malnutrition in children.** An estimated 54,000 families, particularly in eastern Guatemala, are suffering a food shortage. Some farmers have lost up to 90% of their crops. The severe drought has caused an increase in the number of deaths due to starvation.

- September 1: **Ex-military Commissioner Condemned to 150 Years in Prison.** The first trial for forced disappearance in Guatemala found soldier Felipe Cusanero Coj guilty of disappearing six *campesinos* in Chimaltenango during the war.

Human Rights *UPDATE*

• September 1: **Number of Torture Cases Increases.** The Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman has released a report on violence and homicides between January 1 and August 15, 2009 showing an increase in torture cases, particularly cases involving women. This year 106 women have already been tortured and killed, compared with 115 for all of 2008, and 125 in 2007.

• September 11: **Rosenberg Case Advances.** Guatemalan authorities arrested nine men in connection with the May 10 murder of lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg. Six of the suspects are current or former police officers who are linked to a criminal network with a history of money-laundering, drug-trafficking, kidnapping and extortion. Investigators continue their search for the intellectual authors of the crime.



Access to Medicine in Guatemala Impacted by CAFTA

An August 2009 report published by the Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health in the online journal *Health Affairs* demonstrates, in real terms, the high cost of the Central America Free Trade Agreement to all parties involved. "A Trade Agreement's Impact on Access to Generic Drugs" documents how US pharmaceutical companies are barring Guatemalans' access to generic versions of life-saving drugs.

The article highlights the intellectual property provisions of CAFTA that allow for patent and data protection for cancer, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes medications, among others. As a result, companies that hold drug patents possess exclusive rights to extensive research and statistical data collected during the drug's develop-

ment period. In some cases, patents block competition from entering the market for upwards of ten years by refusing to share the data that is imperative to the new drug's approval for sale. For example, whereas Droguería Pisa de Guatemala offered generic insulin for \$5.95 per 100ml, patent-protected Sanofi Aventis US now has exclusive rights to sell therapeutically equivalent insulin for \$50.31 per 100ml. This 846% markup will keep Guatemalans from accessing affordable insulin until the company's data exclusivity rights expire in 2016.

The report cites over 75 cases of data exclusivity and patent protection and conclusively attributes the resulting situation to protocol established in CAFTA. The entire article can be viewed on the Health Affairs website: <http://content.healthaffairs.org>.

EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALENDAR

GHRC Speaker's Tour with Gladys Monterroso:

A Guatemalan torture survivor speaks out on violence, impunity, and immigration reform.

Gladys, a lawyer and university professor, was kidnapped and tortured in March 2009.

Oct. 19-20: **Ashland and Richmond, VA.** Randolph Macon College, Virginia Commonwealth University

Oct. 21: **Baltimore, MD.** College of Notre Dame

Oct. 22-25: **Philadelphia and West Chester, PA.** West Chester University; Swarthmore College; Philadelphia Ethical Society Building (sponsored by Amnesty Group 112); Temple University (co-sponsored by the Greater Philadelphia Latin American Group); Grove Methodist Church (co-sponsored by the Chester Country Peace Movement)

Oct. 26-29: **New York City, Brooklyn and Long Island, NY.** St. Patrick's Church, Huntington, Long, Island; SUNY's Old Westbury; Church Center for the United Nations, Long Island University; Brooklyn event with Latin American Committee

Oct. 29-31: **Boston and New Bedford, MA.** Co-sponsored by Guatemala Solidarity Group of Boston. Boston College, Tufts University, Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies of Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Grupo Maya-K'iche'

Nov. 1-3: **Washington, DC.** American University, Georgetown University, University of Maryland

See the GHRC website for event dates, times, and locations.

Oct. 12: *Día de la Raza.*

Oct. 13, 3pm: Day of action in support of comprehensive immigration reform. Meet on the West Lawn of the Capitol Building (East Capitol and Maryland Ave, SE, Washington, DC).

Nov. 6: GHRC lobby day in support of I-VAWA.

Nov. 20-22: School of the Americas Watch Vigil, Fort Benning, Georgia

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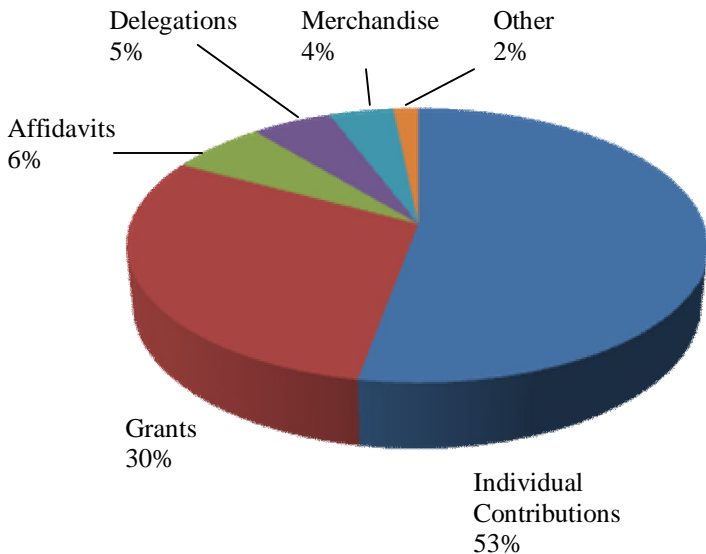
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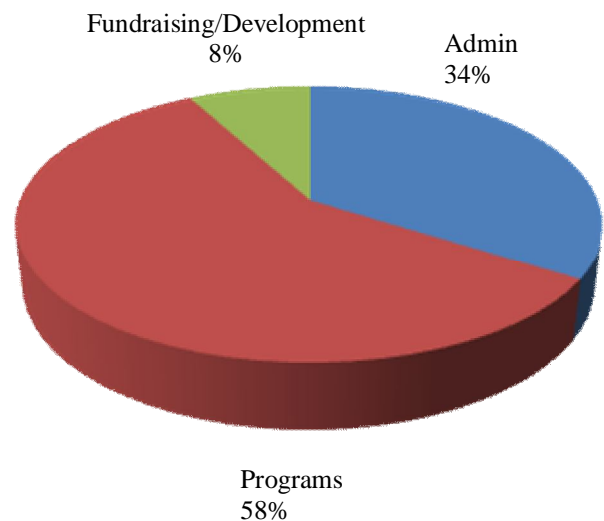
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