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making space for peace

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Uncontrolled logging in forests

A risk to the survival of indigenous communities

On March 3, 2016 www.ecoticias.com published an article with the Top 10 most deforested countries in the world. Guatemala was fourth on the list with an annual deforestation rate of 8.2%. According to the National Forests Institute (INAB), Guatemala has lost close to 20% of its forests in the last 24 years. The first study on Guatemalan forests was conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1988 which concluded that 53% of territory was covered by forests¹. In 2010 and according to INAB statistics, this figure plummeted to only 34.2% of land covered in forests².

Forests in Mayan Cosmovision

It is a fact that large-scale deforestation without the necessary official controls is causing grave

conflicts between communities and logging companies in several regions of the country. Communities are clear on the relationship between this practice and the lack of or scarceness of water. Mayan cosmovision is based on equilibrium of all natural elements and includes the interaction with humans and the environment where they live. Because of this their concept of territory encompasses land, air, rocks, forest, rivers, plants,

animals, people, etc. Territory is the guarantor for survival and livelihoods of the population. For this reason, all elements should be treated with care, so that there are no imbalances that put life at risk. This conception which forms part of the spirituality of these peoples, directly clash with excessive logging which provokes deforestation greatly affecting the system and life of communities.

Aura Lolita Chávez, of the K'iche' Peoples Council (CPK): *“Our ancestors – grandmothers and grandfathers – always told us that the forest is a community of trees and the trees are our sisters and brothers. Because of this we have always understood it like another community that is living with us. This relationship between the peoples’ communities and the forest signifies that there is a direct link with our ancestors and with time – because of the treetops, because of their roots. Their roots are connected to our ancestors and the treetops with the cosmic forces. For this reason there is also an energy relationship. They accompany us during our life, in our processes and in our assemblies. So they are like a community³”*

1. Barrios, F., *Guatemala ha perdido el 20% de sus bosques en menos de 25 años*, April 22, 2016, noticias.com.gt/nacionales/20160422-guatemala-perdido-20-bosques-menos-25-anos.html.
2. seinef.inab.gob.gt, October 31, 2016.
3. Interview with Aura Lolita Chávez, member of K'iche' Peoples Council (CPK), September 24, 2014.

One of the fundamental principles of Mayan thinking is the reciprocity between nature and human beings. That is why communities only use natural resources that are around them and only what is necessary for their daily lives. But capitalist logic has converted wood in an attractive good that can generate important benefits for those who market it. Different companies buy large pieces of land, cut down the trees and make money off the wood.

Aura Lolita Chávez explains that, *when we see the trucks passing by the park, plazas and streets, we see that they are transporting enormous quantities (of cut logs) in vehicles with the capacity to transport heavy volumes. We are outraged and nostalgic – it is as if they were carrying our sisters and brothers who have been violated. We are seeing excessive logging, the loss of biodiversity and deforestation.*

The words of Chávez reflect the need to manage ecosystems in a sustainable manner, but deforesting native trees infringes upon this sustainability. Forests are a fundamental element to daily subsistence in communities, providing essential resources like water, plants and firewood. That is why Chavez points out that communities via their indigenous authorities manage and control a sustainable use of the forests.

National policy

Article 126 of the Guatemalan Constitution states that *reforestation and forest conversation of national urgency and social interest.* Along the same lines, the National Strategy for the Restoration of Forest Landscapes



Members of the CPK accompany a truck carrying wood to request the revision of its logging permits by the relevant authorities. Photo: PBI 2016.

for 2015-2045 aims to reforest 1.2 million hectares in the next 30 years. Since 1996 INAB is the state institution that promotes and implements forest related policy in Guatemala. INAB's objective is *to promote and encourage forest development in the country via sustainable management of forests, reduce deforestation in lands suitably for forestry, promote reforestation in forest areas currently without trees, and increase their productivity*⁴.

To prompt sustainable management of the forest sector, in 2014 INAB launched a legislative bill for the Law to Encourage the Establishment, Recovery, Management, Production and Protection of Forests in Guatemala (PROBOSQUE) which was ratified by Congress in September 2015. This law considers *forests vital for human well-being, to help maintain ecological balance and biodiversity, to protect*

4. seinef.inab.gob.gt, October 31, 2016.

hydrographic basins, to influence in climate tendencies and contribute to the mitigation of and reduce climate change vulnerability. The goal of this law is *to increase forest coverage in the country with the creation and implementation of a program which will encourage public and private investment.*

According to established laws, before INAB grants a logging license, the party must present an application that documents the legality and location of the land. They must present a land title from the General Property Registry which shows that the person requesting the logging license is the legitimate land owner. The next step is to present a management plan which characterizes all of the area to be logged and a plan for logging the land. INAB then conducts a site visit to verify if the application is in compliance with the establish norms, law and regulations. In a final evaluation the logging request application is decided upon. If a favorable opinion is handed down, the applicant pays a 10% collateral of the total amount of wood in feet and reforestation pledges are defined.

INAB also provides technical assistance like how to transport large quantities of wood. The destination of the cut wood also is registered, so that the same quantity of wood indicated in the management plan arrives at the destination⁵. This is the official process that should take place, but unfortunately this practice is not

always complied with. According to **MadreSelva Ecological Collective's** experience, the control mechanisms are very weak. INAB is the state institution who grants licenses to owners but does not control transport. The state forestry policy does not protect forests, to date it only sustains the commercialization for the national and international market⁶.

According to national estimates by the Integrated Forest Account (CIB), one component of the Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting Systems of Guatemala (SCAEI), *more than 95% of the flow of forest products in the country takes place outside the control of national forestry authorities* (INAB and National Council on Protected Areas – CONAP)⁷. The National Civil Police's (PNC) Division of Protection of Nature (DIPRONA), is tasked with controlling the volume of logging, but according to Madre Selva, this institution is poorly endowed and cannot carry out its work.

This lack of control favors illegal logging and consequently the non-compliance with prescribed reforestation. INAB estimates *that illegal logging represents a costs which oscillates around 2.200 million quetzals between losses due to taxes, value of replanting plantations, value of eroded soil and value of carbon stored in forests for Guatemala. In addition the environmental costs to biodiversity and the reconstruction of infrastructure by natural disasters*⁸.

Consequences on uncontrolled deforestation

According to MadreSelva, the State does not contemplate the ecological, social, and cultural values of forests and does not understand its relation with water. The destruction of forests not only has a strong impact on biodiversity, but also increases erosion of land and consequently risks of rain and storms, as well as droughts. In the rainy season, this phenomenon increases the risk of disasters such as landslides and floods, with loss of lives, animals and assets. That is why the environmental group warns that if the necessary measures are not taken to remedy these situations, the gradual worsening is guaranteed.

On the other hand, the most direct consequence and that of greater immediate impact for communities is the scarcity of water. Communities and hamlets located far from cities do not have access to water supply systems, but rather depend on natural springs found in the mountains for daily consumption and to water their crops. In this sense, communities clearly see the relationship between logging and the lack of water in their region.

According to **Adrián Caal Gualim**⁹, *it has taken a long time for the trees to grow and they are cutting them down. This is not of benefit to the community because we know that trees are natural resources where Mother Earth lies so that there will be water and all resources for the good of everyone. But*

5. Ibid.

6. Interview with member of MadreSelva Collective, September 20, 2016.

7. Instituto de Agricultura, Recursos Naturales y Ambiente (IARNA) de la Universidad Rafael Landívar, *Cuenta Integrada del Bosque (CIB). Sistema de Contabilidad Ambiental y Económica Integrada de Guatemala*. Serie divulgativa No. 7. Guatemala, diciembre de 2009.

8. seinef.inab.gob.gt, October 31, 2016.

9. Interview with Adrián Caal Gualim from Finca Primavera in Alta Verapaz, October 6, 2016.

if there are no more trees, there is no more water.

Communities concern for excessive logging is not just about the current situation, but a concern for the well-being of future generations. **Justino Xollim Tilom**¹⁰ comments, *in the future we are going to suffer because of the companies. The companies make money, but the campesinos are going to suffer due to lack of water and their harvests will be worse.*

The lack of control over logging affects economic, social and cultural development of indigenous peoples, which is contemplated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples. Also like **Justino Xollim Tilom** states the lack of consultation contradicts Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Indigenous peoples have the right to free, prior and informed consent before the State grants licenses for projects that will impact their livelihoods. In his own words, *legally they have to consult communities about cutting down trees, because we need water and the day there is no water – we are going to suffer.*

Under this same logic, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in its May 2016

report calls on Guatemala, the private sector, the World Bank and other international economic agencies to *recognize that serious initiatives aimed at radically changing the situation of growing and widespread poverty among indigenous peoples in Guatemala require reforms (...) which should ensure a more equitable distribution and access to traditional lands of indigenous peoples of Guatemala, in accordance with the rights set forth in the United Nations Declaration and based on respect and legal recognition of their collective rights, including the right to development based on self-determination.*



Inspection of logging in the mountains of the Granadillas, Zacapa. Photo: PBI 2016.

10. Interview with Justino Xollim Tilom from Finca Primavera in Alta Verapaz, October 6, 2016.

Living in protected areas

The life of communities in Sierra del Lacandón and Laguna del Tigre, Petén

Until the 1950s, ninety percent of the Petén Department was covered in jungle and had a very low population density. The Maya q'eqchi' population of the area started to emigrate from Alta Verapaz during the second half of the 19th century. In 1959 this situation started to change. In that same year, Law Number 1286 created the Company to Encourage Economic Development in the Petén (FYDEP) was ratified by Congress, whose mandate was to *colonize the department and generate agriculture development*. The opening of new means of communication and the new perception of the Petén as virgin, unlimited land attracted population from other departments of Guatemala. What was once temporary migration and limited in space transformed into uncontrolled migration. In 1989 the State of Guatemala started a new project for conservation purposes in the Petén. By way of Legislative Decree 4-89, the Protected Area Law (LAP) went into

force. As a result the inhabitants of these communities were left without the right to be owners, even though they had lived there for years. These communities arrived to these lands in the framework of a different colonization processes carried out by the State and the Army during plans of relocation for populations during the internal armed conflict¹. After the Protected Area Law entered into force, the communities settled in these areas were considered by National Council on Protected Areas (CONAP)² as *usurping or invasive communities* and subject to forced evictions. Since then they live under the daily threat of being evicted.

The population affected by the implementation of these policies comment, we were never informed or consulted about the scope of this law³. According to Margarita Hurtado, *it is probable that community participation from the start of the project would have allowed for greater comprehension and commitment on behalf of people*

from various localities with the conservation project. Moreover, the negative perception by planners of the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (RBM) of the Petén inhabitants as *a nuisance and a problem for the successful implementation of their conservation plans and not what they actually are – an essential part of the environment* might have varied⁴.

In light of this historical context and the current situation, it is important to listen to the voices of the people who live in the Protected Areas in La Sierra del Lacandón and Laguna del Tigre to understand firsthand what it means to live in these conditions as well as their assessment of their presence as support to environmental protection in these areas⁵.

Challenges and difficulties for daily life

There are no official statistics on the population in La Sierra del Lacandón and Laguna del Tigre.

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1. AA.VV, *Tierra e Igualdad. Desafíos para la Administración de Tierras en Petén*. Guatemala, Departamento de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural para América Latina (LSCAR) del Banco Mundial, 2012, p. 91.
 2. In the framework of the Protected Area Law the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (RBM) was created whose administration was delegated to CONAP.
 3. Interview with Rubén Domínguez, member of Human Rights Law Firm (BDH), 10.02.2015. Since 2011, the BDH provides legal counsel to 20 communities in Laguna del Tigre and Sierra del Lacandón.
 4. Hurtado, M., *Petén: ¿La última frontera? Construcción social de una región*, FLACSO, Guatemala, 2010, p. 107, 108.
 5. We interviewed 4 people in protected areas in August 2016. These people have asked to remain anonymous (to prevent the risk of being criminalized).

According to the people interviewed, the population is 60,000 to 80,000 people. The main activity of these communities revolves around land including protecting, planting and harvesting it. They also look after the timber and fruit trees. None-the-less, day to day they feel a sense of uncertainty, insecurity and worry about evictions. They ask themselves, *why do we plant if they are going to evict us tomorrow?* Their situation of poverty makes life difficult lacking basic services like education, shelter, and food. In most cases they decide to migrate to urban areas to access them. For example, to educate their children the communities have with great effort built schools. The people interviewed explain, *most children finish grade school and then there is nothing for them to continue studying. Parents take the risk of sending their children to central areas so that they can get an adequate education – the children go alone and many times they can get lost.* For this reason they think there should be schools in their community.

The absence of these services aggravate especially the situation of women and children. On many occasions boys cannot go to school because they go directly to work in agriculture, while girls work in the kitchen and take care of their siblings. Just as a woman from Sierra del Lacandón describes, *in our communities both girls and boys from a young age join as couples to form new families (...). Sometimes 12 and 13 year old girls are raising their own children. All of this is provoked by a lack of adequate education.*

In addition, the lack of health services is another problem that affects development in communities. There is not even a health unit to attend to minor things in the area. They explain



Meeting in one of the schools constructed by community members. School of the community Gloria Nueva Esperanza, in the Laguna del Tigre. Photo: Noé Amador.

the number of obstacles encountered when someone is sick: *without money, without transportation, without access..., this adds insult to the injury.* The consequences of this situation are both individual and collective. *Women give birth at home in many cases and many times there are complications and she needs emergency care – some (women) die or lose their baby.*

Because of this situation, many youth and heads of household have been forced to migrate to the United States. They feel that from their communities they cannot do anything to improve the life conditions of their families.

The Guatemalan State and unequal treatment

The population in Sierra del Lacandón and Laguna del Tigre feel abandoned by the State. This is reflected in the rough daily conditions described, characterized by lack of basic services to sustain a dignified and healthy

life. Just like the interviewed people state, this is the land they live on and they do not have an alternative place to go. For this reason, they think the State should help them like the campesino population they are. They understand about production and the relation with earth the respect for the environment which in itself is protection for these areas. However, the State is not taking responsibility for the emergency situation of these communities which means that their way of life is now based on subsistence economy, cultivation just as their ancestors did. They harvest maize, black beans, squash seeds and those who can have a few cows or cattle for family consumption.

Beyond this abandonment the people interviewed report that *the State, by way of its institutions, far from helping – have destroyed our homes by setting them on fire, they don't allow us to build a school for example – not even with our own effort – because CONAP does not*

allow building materials to enter the community. And they won't let us build a health post either (...). And they also pick our harvest which is our livelihood.

They feel and express that there is unequal or different treatment for people from communities and people with a certain economic potential. While campesinos can do practically nothing on the land as it was declared a Protected Area, companies can make use of this liberty: cutting down trees, provoking deforestation, to bolster their cattle businesses and other activities without suffering a sanction from the State. In their own words they express, *we have never seen the State sanction someone – a plantation owner for example, a company, but we have seen them put a campesino in jail (...). We call this unequal treatment.* They say they know places where communities have been evicted and now on those lands there are cattle ranches, *this shows that they do kick off the campesinos, but give power to other people with economic potential.*

They have strong feelings of exclusión. The fact they live in a protected area does not give them any guarantee or security, if not rather it makes them live in constant threat of suffering an eviction. They believe it is very difficult to benefit from community development projects and explain that *they are not taken into account like people with rights, because if you say you live in Laguna del Tigre, they say you can't invest there as it is a protected area or they say "too bad, I would like to help you, but I can't".* Because of this, they state that it is urgent that the State find the adequate way to approach the subject, guaranteeing the human rights of the communities

that live there and ensuring that they are not violated.

The instrument the State uses to regulate permanence of the population in these Protected Areas, are the controversial Cooperative Agreements. According to Domínguez, these have been implanted unilaterally by CONAP to tolerate indefinite permanence in these areas, while eviction is achieved. The affected communities take on these agreements *that they are a denial of the right to live there, a strategy, because with these agreements it is assumed that the land is not owned by the people who live there and we are forced to sign them because if we don't they will evict us. They treat us like invaders, usurpers and criminalize us as a group.* For this reason they describe this situation as a continuous violation of their human rights. Along those lines, they reference the eviction that happened seven years ago in the Community Centro Uno and its consequences:

due to lack of relocation and access to land people died of malnutrition, but these deaths were never associated with the eviction and these human rights violations have been denied and left in impunity.

Caring for the environment in the area

The people who live in these areas express that the communities use good practices related to protecting the environment, jungle and water. But they state they always run into limitations and obstacles. The State does not recognize or guarantee their permanence on this land. In the words of those interviewed: *we are obligated to clear the land to plant corn and beans – this is the only thing we can do to live. These are ancestral practices that we have been doing for centuries and they are not unfriendly to the environment. If the State would value the efforts of the communities and facilitate our*



Burning of a house due to a forced eviction in the community Nueva Esperanza, 2011. Photo: Noé Amador.

development, it would improve the protection for forests and everything else. We believe that the communities can do this because we are there – we live there and we have many ideas of how to protect it (...). For us it is worrisome because if the State does not take into account communities to protect the environment then it will be difficult to do so. The State views us as enemies, chasing us, putting us in jail, threatening us with eviction. It would be better if they would see us as human being who can contribute to protect the environment.

The communities propose that the State view them as allies, actors that can contribute to improving the environment and contribute to protecting forests as well as

in prevention and fighting forest fires. They conclude by stating *the State should give incentives to communities because at the end of the day it is a benefit to the country.*

The communities cannot live only off of air and the forest, they need an economic incentive that allows them to carry out this care (for the environment).

ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL FOR INTEGRAL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

More than 40 communities that inhabit the Sierra del Lacandón and Laguna del Tigre protected areas presented an Alternative Proposal for Integral and Sustainable Development to the State of Guatemala on September 28, 2016. This proposal seeks to guarantee their perpetual permanence in harmony with nature in the territories which are sources of life to them⁶. In this proposal communities promise to care for, protect and secure natural resources in the area for future generations while demanding that the State promise to not evict communities who benefit from collective property. With the submission of this proposal they request a space for dialogue to ask the Guatemalan State to recognize their communities and guarantee their permanence in the territory as well as the security of their lands for present and future generations⁷.

6. Centro de Medios Independientes (CMI), *Comunidades Peteneras presentan una propuesta de desarrollo al Estado*, September 28, 2016.

7. Information extracted from Alternative to Cooperative Agreement Proposal.

Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity

Prosperity for who?

Due to the migration crisis of unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) in 2014, the US government launched a plan to reverse migration patterns. The budget for the plan is one billion dollars, of which a large percentage of funds are conditioned by the compliance of migratory goals by the governments of the region. These actions include establishing an economic development agenda, employment generation and improving security in these countries with the object of reducing migration to the United States. The strategic lines of action are as follows¹:

The big unknowns that arise are: what will be the strategy to distribute the plan's budget and to what extent will it be implemented to tend to local needs and the implementation capacities of each country. Among some of the criticism from Guatemalan civil society is the following: imposition and strengthening of the neoliberal development model in recent decades, which will further aggravate existing agrarian conflict; strong pressure from Guatemalan textile and energy sector businesses; doubts around the efficiency of this plan to reduce structural problems like inequality and violence, the main causes for migration north.

To delve deeper in this analysis, we share reflections from different Guatemalan actors which contribute to the debate around the possible scope and contradictions generated by the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity.

Doctor Úrsula Roldán Andrade, coordinator of the Migration Department at the Institute for Research and Political Management at the Rafael Landívar University²

Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity has had different versions. The 2014 proposal is a carbon copy of the Mesoamerican Project and we understand that this was presented by the Inter-American Development Bank who continues to be a technical advisor in the process. It has been said that the three Central American governments are the ones you put forth the plan, but the four strategic lines of action are very similar to what was presented in the Mesoamerican Project in 2014. In 2015 we started to notice a few changes: the orientation of where the Plan is going financially and the definition of territories in which it is supposed to intervene. The territories that were initially presented were the south coast and some of the west and then the geographical focus changed to the departments that have greatest migration. Another important

A. Stimulate the productive sector to create economic opportunities	i. Promoting strategic sectors and attracting investment ii. Reducing energy costs and ensuring reliability of electricity supply iii. Modernizing and expanding infrastructure and logistical corridors iv. Coordinating border management v. Encouraging international trade
B. Developing opportunities for human capital	i. Tightening links between labor supply and demand from businesses ii. Building human capital
C. Improve public security and enhance access to justice	i. Strengthen programs to prevent violence ii. Strengthen institutions responsible for public security iii. Modernize the justice system
D. Strengthen institutions to increase populations trust in the State	i. Ensure States' financial capacity ii. Increase transparency

1. *Lineamientos del Plan de la Alianza para la Prosperidad del Triángulo Norte, Plan Regional de El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras*. In: www.encuentroplanalianza.com, September 2014.
 2. Interview with Úrsula Roldán Andrade conducted October 7, 2016.

change that was not in the 2014 plan is the emphasis on institutional strengthening and justice, concretely strategic support for the CICIG and the MP.

All of the funding for the Plan does not go through the government rather through its agencies. These agencies are going to put forth a bid to companies so that all funds will go through this way... The priorities that are in the US budget are campesino economy proposals, violence prevention and health. The part on the topic of security is murky, referring to US support through the Central American Regional Security Initiative, the project for financing security of the Northern Triangle that has been functioning in past years. This program can be translated into the southern command and military bases, maritime control, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and task forces (San Marcos, Chortí and Xinca), a circuit that affects migration but also control of drug trafficking, organized crime and human trafficking. These are located in more or less boarder areas, linked to oceans and transit zones of Central American and Mexico as the US understands national security.

The focus on US national security can be seen from different stances. Firstly, from the migration stance: there is a clear political retention of migrants so they do not continue going to the US. States must control and stop this. Secondly, is drug trafficking and organized crime; and that is where one understands that they are linked to the strategy of the CICIG because there is a clear intention to dismantle criminal entities and the cooptation of the State. This is

what slightly balances the security focus: what they want is to stop migration, but also organized crime. It is true that to a certain extent this could favor decreasing the causes of migration, but the **fear is how far will they go with security and the fact the people continue going – this is not stopping- what will happen is that migration becomes more dangerous.**

The Plan has a double focus, on one hand the human rights focus, monitored by US civil society organization and on the other hand the entrepreneurial focus that is going to be used to legitimize what they want to do – this being extractive, hydroelectric and energy projects. FUNDESA³ has always been part of negotiating the Plan. They were with Otto Pérez Molina and continue with Jimmy Morales and thus I think they intend to take advantage of the Plan's framework to say: "This is the Plan for Prosperity." For example, intermediate cities. This is not proposed in the Plan, this is a proposal of CACIF⁴ and FUNDESA who can go sell this to the US and the cooperation and all the world as if were part of the Plan. But this is not part of the Plan, this is their own project and perfectly articulated with attracting investment discourse and trickle-down economics that does not quarrel with the US vision. And there is another risk of positioning the PPTN as another proposal of "progress" linked to these investments.

The States that form part of the Alliance Plan use their budget resources, that are very weak, to apply priorities of the Plan. The Plan plummeted in the sense that it is not



Photo: Úrsula Roldan Andrade 2016.

a big investment that the 2014 Plan called for, yet simple projects: on youth and education – projects that truly have no impact. In Guatemala the Plan has been prioritized in three municipalities: Nebaj, Jocotán and Momostenango, municipalities with high rates of poverty and malnutrition but not high levels of migration.

On the other hand, there are 16 clauses that if not complied with, the money will not come to the States. Among these, there are three or four on human rights. One has to do with reparation for the Chixoy case, another with the community participation in decisions through the respect of consultation and thirdly respect for human rights defenders.

I believe that it is unrealistic that the Plan will stop migration. Migration favors the economic sector because they are the ones who handle remittances. I call it an instrumental plan that the US uses to intervene in Central America. The message of the US is: accept diplomatic ways that we use to seal the boarder, that is to say, or cooperate a little with changes for stability from the US' viewpoint

3. Foundation for the Development of Guatemala.

4. Coordinating Committee of Agricultura, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations.

or we will build walls and have greater security. This position could vary with the arrival of a Trump presidency.

In reference to intermediate cities as a theoretical proposal to territorial development, this could be interpreted positively because a city generates demand from the country and the city would have to permit other kinds of cities that the countryside currently does not have. But this is in theory and in more democratic countries. In countries like Guatemala where general inequality is a main problem and disproportionate nature of countryside – complementary city. What the business sector wants is to have presence and control over these intermediate cities from the focus of tourism, external investment (mining, hydroelectric, African palm), roads but they are not counting communities. This is the risk in this unequal country – where no development proposal is going to work if they do not incorporate different visions of indigenous communities and poor, rural communities.

Omar Jerónimo, member of New Day Ch'orti' Campesino Central Coordinator⁵

In relation to the vision for development, the business people say the country will resolve its problems through urbanizing creating overtime a smaller rural population. To them the campesinos are a problem of underdevelopment. This vision is seen in the National Plan for Development K'atun 2032 which presents Guatemala in 2032 with five large metropolis. These metropolis need water, energy, technology, etc. The city in the east will have a concentration of one or two million people. When you live outside of the metropolis you have less access to water, services, and technology. Guatemala is the country which least reduces its campesino population in Latin America, but they want to reduce it by 50% in 2032. When you go to urban areas, they are still rural. Although they say that 60% is urban and 40% is rural, it is not so.

The Alliance Plan puts forth the idea that indigenous peoples are

backward, rural people. And I ask myself, who is the partner interested in development in Guatemala? FUNDESA and the government. To boost the economies, one must think about where and how to invest to ensure that investments are going to be stable and sustainable. **The Plan has difficulties in this regard: on what is invested and on the participation of the population.** Participation was more directed towards business guilds or organizations more aligned with business groups, like FUNDESA. The Plan is not clear on how it is built. Urban development experts are participating, but not the population itself.

Another difficulty has to do with transparency. The population of Jocotán does not know that their municipality is one of the three pilot municipalities where the Plan will be put into place. Indigenous authorities and social organizations are also not informed.

In the end, in terms of development, I will not forget the words of an indigenous authority who

Lolita Chávez, member of the Council of Pueblos K'iche' (CPK)⁶

The word *development* does not exist in our cosmovision, we have the word *life model*, but it is not the same. Model is a way to be in which humanity is not the center of existence, but is another element of life. This is interconnected with other beings that are also life and give life – those area plants, biodiversity, and other constellations. This existential, inter-generational, cosmos is the form of life that has nothing to do with capital.



Photo: PBI 2016

5. Interview with Omar Jerónimo conducted September 8, 2016.

6. Interview with Lolita Chávez conducted September 21, 2016.

pronounced a few years ago in Las Flores: *I dream of a day that my daughter can go out, go bathe and not feel afraid that they will rape her. I dream my son will be able to go into the woods and not be fearful of being killed.* For people, if we could translate that full life into a word that understands the western vision of development, it is simply to live in peace, without feeling aggression from anyone, without feeling that no one presses us because it considers that what is being done is against what is considered development.



Photo: PBI 2016.

Domingo Hernández, member of the Association Maya Uk' ux B'e'⁷

It is possible that the Plan for Prosperity will lower migration, temporarily, that is to say a few months but no one can stop migration that is happening not only in Central America but in different parts of the world because it is the result of a capitalist system that exploits territories. North Americans know all too well because they are the ones who caused the crisis, war mongers, promoters of exploitation, for this reason they do not want to resolve problems but control them. The Plan for Prosperity for the three countries will also strengthen military presence. Just like they control drugs – they don't want to eliminate drugs then they would not have a reason to justify North American military presence. For this reason it is important to understand the meaning of the word control: control the crisis, not solve the crisis, these are two different things. North Americans cannot do without cheap Latino labor. The immigrants are the ones that take on the hardest jobs. They even take them to be part of the troops that invade different parts of the world, creating a false sense of democracy that proclaim imperial interests.

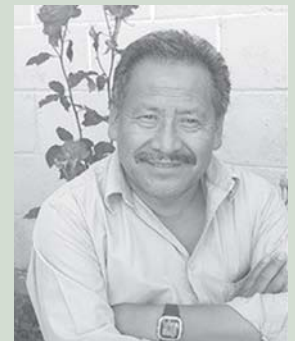


Photo: Domingo Hernández.

In Guatemala many people are on the streets because they have been deported without being able to finish paying off their debts to coyotes (human traffickers) placing their lands or homes as collateral. They are left in misery. Some have done well for themselves, but when they return, immigrants do not know how to re-start their lives again. If they were able to buy a car, a motorcycle, or a house, sometimes they sell them. Capitalism for indigenous people is not an alternative. For this reason the indigenous peoples of the continent propose the construction of plurinational States. This new paradigm for peoples, different from commodification, individualism, corruption that capitalism inherits. Our horizon is to recover our relationship with Mother Earth, support the reconstruction of the powers of Mother Earth which is the prelude for the reconstitution of the values and principles of peoples in general and of indigenous peoples in particular that for centuries we have been maintaining a worldview that is expressed in the ceremonial activities that is the maximum reciprocity with the Mother Earth that has given us life to every living thing. And this is not in the Plan for Prosperity because it is a project of capitalism that tries to mitigate problems that they themselves have caused counter insurgency wars in the region, looting the peoples' territories, unconditional support for dictatorships on the continent. Plan for Prosperity is like trying to cure cancer with aspirin.

7. Interview with Domingo Hernández conducted September 24, 2016.

News of our work

Progress in transitional justice: CREOMPAZ Case

We are history and we write it because we have lived it, and we still want to live. We want to see justice. We ask God for our health and life to be able to see that justice. And that in Guatemala this never happens again¹.

2016 has been a key year for transitional justice in Guatemala. The Sepur Zarco case went to trial and a historic sentence was handed down recognizing the sexual violence committed against indigenous women during the internal armed conflict as a crime against humanity. The Ixil Genocide case continued its course. More than a dozen retired military officials were captured and will have to face legal accusations in the **CREOMPAZ and Molina Theissen case**.

In this context and in our thematic focus on the fight against impunity, in March we began accompanying the Neighbors Association of Chicoyogüito in Alta Verapaz (AVECHAV). This Association is co-complainant in the CREOMPAZ case and seeks to assert its right to memory, truth and justice.

We stand as witnesses and co-complainants because we will always remember.

The CREOMPAZ case opened after the detention of 14 retired military personnel charged with forced disappearance and crimes against humanity on January 6, 2016. The acronym for this case corresponds to the current Regional Command for Training and Peacekeeping Operations located on the former military base #21 in Coban, Alta Verapaz. This is where those charged performed their duties between 1981 and 1987, the period when the events they are being charged with took place.

Our support to AVECHAV started with accompaniment to witnesses

in the case when they went to testify in the Tribunal de Mayor Riesgo A presided by Judge Claudette Domínguez. Their testimonies are key elements both for the quest for truth and justice as well as to bring dignity to victims whose painful memories have accompanied them for more than three decades.

One of AVECHAV members explains the reason they became witnesses and co-complainants in the following manner: *we live this in our memory, we have suffered, we have this in our memories, all of us, we have this (in our memories) and it is never going to be erased. It is the truth of what happened to us. We have suffered what we tell. Above all this truth is about Chicoyogüito and other towns in many departments of Guatemala*



Press conference of the plaintiff organisations in the Creompaz case. Photo: PBI 2016.

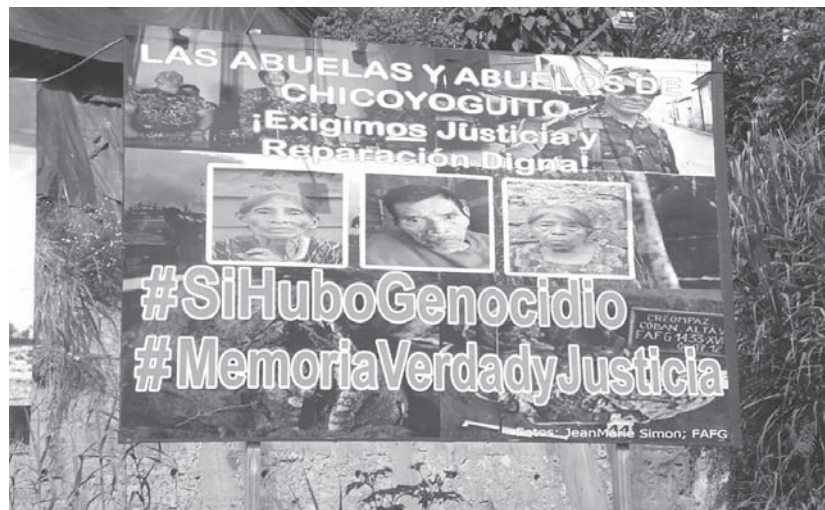
1. Interview with a member of AVECHAV, Cobán, September 10, 2016.

have suffered – all that we suffered in the hands of the military. We have this on our lips, in our minds and we have to tell it. We know very well what happened and for this reason, for our souls, we have to be co-complainants. First of all, what we want to achieve is justice.

To recover the memory of what happened and thus guarantee truth and justice, it is necessary to carry out a process that makes visible and recognizes the victims of the internal armed conflict. One of the Peace Accords signed in 1994 established the creation of the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH). Among its purposes, the Commission recommended *measures to preserve the memory of victims, to encourage a culture of mutual respect and observance of human rights (...)*. With the opening of the CREOMPAZ case, the survivors constituted as co-complainants in AVECHAV, want the human rights violations that they were victims of to be recognized to help them gain a little peace.

We won't go back, we must go forward, even with threats – we must move forward. We have to show that we, indigenous people, are persecuted for our land, for telling the truth – they want to silence us.

In the words of a member of AVECHAV *the history of Chicoyogüito is the history of about 250 families and is a very sad history. About 1960 the military started coming in, Chicoyogüito is militarized and the communities that before worked for German landowners then had to*



Banner at the entrance to Cobán, Alta Verapaz. Photo: AVECHAV 2016.

work for the military without pay. The member tells how his family and all of the families of Chicoyogüito were forced to leave the community in 1968: people then settled wherever they could until today. There was never a return. Here where I live, the same people are here who arrived during those years – we are the same (ones). Chicoyogüito turned into a military center and no one ever returned. Everything is pain.

This was the story narrated by witnesses in court. Carrying out this necessary work in Guatemala, for justice and against impunity, is an activity that in itself involves serious risks for the people involved. According to the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEGUA), from the time the CREOMPAZ and Molina Theissen cases started, the co-complainants and people who defend the right to justice and truth were subject to aggression of defamation and / or intimidation².

In this same focus on the fight against impunity, we accompany the Human Rights Law Firm (BDH) whose lawyers have been the target of intimidation and defamation for working on cases that involve retired military personnel. Given this context of threat and harassment, this year we published an alert with the necessary updates, on the security situation of the BDH members and other lawyers.

On June 7th in the CREOMPAZ case, it was decided to open trial with eight of the syndicated military personnel. This was celebrated by the co-complainants and witnesses as well as by other people who fight for historical memory in Guatemala. While the trial lasts, we will continue to accompany the Association and the Human Rights Law Firm, complying with our mandate to support the opening of social and political space for human rights defenders who face repression, threats, and persecution for the development of their important work.

2. UDEFEGUA, *Situación de Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos en Guatemala enero - septiembre 2016*, September 2016 Report.



making space for peace

PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL GUATEMALA PROJECT

PBI is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) which protects human rights and promotes non-violent transformation of conflicts. At the request of threatened social organizations, it provides international accompaniment and observation. The presence of international volunteers backed by a support network helps to deter violence. In this way, PBI creates space for local activists to work for social justice and human rights.

PBI in Guatemala

PBI maintained a team of volunteers in Guatemala from 1983 to 1999. During those years, it carried out accompaniment work with human rights organizations, unions, indigenous and campesino organizations, refugees and churches. In 1999, after an evaluation process, it was decided to close the project since the country had greatly advanced in the opening of space for the work of human rights organizations. Nevertheless, PBI continued attentive to the happenings in Guatemala through a follow-up committee.

From the middle of 2000, PBI began receiving a number of requests for international accompaniment. Due to these requests, **PBI** carried out an investigation in the field that made evident a turn in the direction and a losing of space for human rights defenders. In April of 2002, **PBI** decided to reopen the Guatemala Project in order to carry out international accompaniment and observation in coordination with other international

accompaniment and observation in coordination with other international accompaniment NGOs. In April 2003, the new **PBI** office was opened in Guatemala.

Mandate and Principles

Contribute to improve the human rights situation in Guatemala, and hereby strengthen the social and political processes that promote the enhancement of democracy and participation in the country and the region. Therefore **PBI** employs an international presence to create and maintain open political space for human rights defenders, lawyers, union members, campesino and indigenous organizations, and civil society groups that are suffering repression due to their work supporting human rights.

PBI follows the principles of non-violence, non-partisanship and non-interference.

Team office in Guatemala

3a. Avenida "A", 3-51 zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala
Tel: (00502) 2220 1032 / 2232 2930
correo-e: equipo@pbi-guatemala.org

Coordination Office

Avda Entrevías, 76, 4º B, 28053 Madrid, Estado Español
Tel: (0034) 918 543 150
correo-e: coordinacion@pbi-guatemala.org

Web: www.pbi-guatemala.org
Facebook: **PBI-Guatemala Project**

TEAM IN GUATEMALA

Eulàlia Padró Giral (Spanish State), Manon Fenoy (France), Brigitte Fischer-Brühl (Germany), Corsin Blumenthal (Switzerland), Alicia Gutiérrez Esturillo (Spanish State), Roberto Meloni (Italy), Stephanie Brause (Germany), Kateřina Rosochová (Czech Republic), Catriona Rainsford (United Kingdom/Australia) and Cristina Ortega González (Spanish State).



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