

Crimes against Humanity in Guatemala: How the CIA and the Pentagon Supported the Military Dictatorship

The trial of Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt and his military intelligence chief, José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez

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They seemed more than any other people to love their children” – Bartolomé de las Casas

In Guatemala the trial of Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt and his military intelligence chief, José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, proceeds with testimonies of surviving Mayan victims¹; a soldier has given testimony implicating the current President of Guatemala, Otto Pérez Molina, a major at the time, in crimes of the Ixil area under his responsibility.² The trial can be followed online at <http://www.riosmontt-trial.org/>.

In rural Iowa, the *Muscatine Journal*³ finds the degree of the crime horrifying, noting the U.S. military contributed 90% of the Guatemalan army's resources. *The New York Times* op. ed page,⁴ notes that the terrible details of what was done to Mayan victims aren't likely to dignify them. As the horror under Ríos Montt's rule is revealed in the States, any link to the military regime's motive is ignored. The reason for the campaign of exterminating Mayan Indians appears to be military: native communities were accused of providing shelter for a guerrilla movement.

The United Fruit Company overthrow of elected President Arbenz, referred to as a CIA takeover, secured growing-land. The United Fruit Company's motive was purely profit, which increases with an absence of local resistance, and increases again when there isn't appropriate compensation to the peoples whose lands are used for foreign profits.

Throughout the Caribbean the barbarities of the New World's discovery were initially fueled by the greed for gold: in the early 1500's the genocide of the Arawak people was firmly established; they were forced to mine gold under such intolerable conditions that great numbers committed suicide. Other groups had resisted naked with wooden swords: the mayhem which wearied Spanish soldiers by the end of each day, cleared land for plantation use.

Guatemala's former dictator Ríos Montt and General Sánchez are now on trial, five hundred years later, for genocide of Ixil Mayan Indians from 1982 to 1983. The trial is the first to question in a court of the Americas, Christianity's and Europe's history on this side of the

ocean. After immunity as a Guatemalan Senator, a very old general who has outlasted his firmly diabolical strength is finally called to account for the ongoing crime so deep in North, Central and South America that we can't see ourselves reflected in its mirror.

Ríos Montt was strongly supported by U.S. President Reagan, and Ríos Montt's alleged crime as the country's leader is contained compared to the crimes of former Presidents Bush and former Prime Minister Blair, whose victims have become an entire people of Iraq, mostly Muslims. Guatemala is honouring its commitment to the Convention on Genocide, which the U.S. and Canada have attempted to render inapplicable domestically.⁵

Ríos Montt supporters have demonstrated outside the trial insisting "There was no genocide," while within the courthouse the judge must consider deaths of possibly 300,000 Mayan Indians, overwhelming evidence from previous international deliberations and current devastating testimonies. Disturbingly the protest is accompanied by the March 17th kidnapping of four Indigenous leaders and execution of one of them. The Xinca people are opposing Escobal silver mine, owned by Canada's Goldcorp and Tahoe Resources. The company is attempting to extract resources, against the wishes of the majority of the area's Indian population.

And days before a High Court decision allowed the genocide trial to proceed⁶, on March 15th, Guatemala's highest court sided with the mining corporations against indigenous people by affirming the *Mining Law of 1997* which denies indigenous people their voice in the use and disposition of their lands. *Mining Watch Canada* points out the ruling contravenes not only the *Guatemalan Peace Accords*, the *American Convention on Human Rights*, the *International Labour Organization Convention No. 169* "on the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples," but also the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The case will now go to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.⁷

While Guatemala's trial of Ríos Montt on charges of genocide provides North Americans with an introduction to awareness, the same dynamic to control land and resources is reflected in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Peru, Honduras, Haiti, among other countries of the Americas. Its parallels in the U.S. and Canada are masked in long established economic controls.

In Argentina, seven military and security personnel were recently convicted of "crimes against humanity within the context of genocide."⁸ The country's former dictator, General Jorge Rafael Videla, is on trial for the war crimes during his participation in "Operation Condor." Already sentenced to life in prison for other war crimes, on March 17th he publicly threatened the current government with a military led uprising.⁹ Videla represents a rule by terror which proved acceptable to the middle classes and was essentially coordinated by and at the service of U.S. and global corporate interests. Information on the current trial is becoming increasingly difficult to find and is currently entirely suppressed by the news media. The issue dropped from coverage shortly after selection of Pope Francis (of Argentina).

Claims of the new Pope's collaboration with the Videla government's crimes are contested by the Church. Evidence from the indictment and trial of Videla and his intelligence chief for their responsibilities under Operation Condor, may encourage trials in Chile, Paraguay,

Uruguay, among countries involved in a military program which exterminated dissidents and leftists throughout South and Central America.

In Brazil, the ecologists continue to be murdered. A trial of three men accused in the Marabá (state of Para) ambush murders of Jose Claudio da Silva and Maria do Espirito Santo (previous) has begun. The couple were part of a long standing campaign to stop logging and slave labour in the region. *The Brazilian Communications Company* suggests motive for the killings was the intention to clear the land of a native settlement.¹⁰ The murders were followed by ten others within three months. Since 1964 nearly a thousand church, legal workers and *campesinos* have been killed in the struggle against large landowners and logging concerns, among them the American nun, Dorothy Stang, whose killers were eventually prosecuted.¹¹

In Peru, Indigenous peoples of the North are in ongoing protest of North American mining interests. 84% of Peru's Amazonian forest is leased to oil and gas concessions. The government has declared a national environmental emergency due to metal and chemical contamination of the Peruvian Amazon's Pastaza River.¹²

In Honduras, recent video evidence from a warehouse surveillance camera shows the death squad murder of two students and attempted murder of three others. No charges were laid.¹³ Since a military coup at the service of the Honduran elite and U.S. interests, over a hundred dissidents and community leaders have been murdered (extensive background¹⁴).

In Haiti, Jean-Claude Duvalier's return in 2011 was met with charges of both financial and human rights crimes. The court refused to try him for crimes against humanity, claiming their statute of limitations under Haitian law has expired. An appeal was brought which may reinstate the charges of human rights crimes. Duvalier briefly appeared before the court February 28th, then entered a hospital. Witness testimony explored the abuse and torture of prisoners. The court is currently adjourned until April 11th. Victim witnesses wait to stand for their most basic human rights.

In Mexico, while Monsanto Corporation has 40,000 U.S. acres planted with its genetically modified seed, it is attempting to plant 700,000 hectares in Mexico's Sinaloa state.¹⁵

Concerning El-Salvador, in the U.S. Julie Preston of *The New York Times*, has taken the Justice Department to court to obtain immigration and trial records for Gen. Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, a resident of Florida. Gen. Vides was in charge of El Salvador's National Guard and subsequently its Minister of Defense, through the years 1979-1989. The "Salvadoran option" exported for use in Iraq was developed under Gen. Vides. His responsibility for disappearances, torture, death squad killings and other crimes as well as the murder of American citizens, has been questioned by various U.S. courts. His defense has argued he was doing what the U.S. needed him to in the 'war on communism.' In 2009 the Department of Homeland Security called for his deportation and in a case pressed by Immigration's *Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center*, on February 12th, 2012, the judge of an immigration court agreed.¹⁶ It was under Gen. Vides, that four U.S. Catholic Church workers, Sr. Dorothy Kazel, Sr. Maura Clarke, Sr. Ita Ford, and Jean Donovan, were tortured, raped and executed by El Salvadoran National Guardsman, December 2, 1980.

The basic mechanism and motivation of a genocide now being brought to judgement in Guatemala, is mirrored in injustices throughout the Americas. The crimes and cruelties of atrocities against the innocent are almost beyond the North American public's ability to process, yet they accompany European history of the Americas since "discovery." With the shift in perspective which calls to account a norm of genocide masquerading under different names, the power elite is no longer safe from direct accountability to the people.

Notes

¹ "Faces covered, rape victims testify at trial of Guatemala's former military strongman," Sonia Perez-Diaz (AP), April 2, 2013, *Leader-Post*.

² "Testigo implica a Otto Pérez Molina en juicio por genocidio," J.Ramos, S. Valdez, B. Vásquez, April 5, 2013, *Prensa Latina*.

³ "A Guatemalan tyrant faces justice at last," Mary Sanchez, April 1, 2013, *Muscatine Journal*.

⁴ "On the Brink of Justice in Guatemala," Anita Isaacs, March 27, 2013, *The New York Times*.

⁵ "North American game plans and the Convention on Genocide," John Bart Gerald, May 23, 2012, *nightslantern.ca*.

⁶ On March 13, 2013, the Guatemalan Court of Constitutionality denied Ríos Montt amnesty (*nights lantern*).

⁷ "Guatemala's Highest Court Denies Justice to Indigenous Peoples Affected by Mining," CIEL / CPO, March 15, 2013, *Mining Watch Canada*.

⁸ "Argentine court jails seven for genocide crimes," March 23, 2013, *9News World*.

⁹ "'The military will prevent CFK from perpetuating in power,' Videla," March 17, 2013, *Buenas Aires Herald*.

¹⁰ " Suspected killers of ecologists on trial in Brazil," Agence Free Press, April 3, 2013, *globalpost.com*; "Trial starts for killing of Brazil activists," Aljazeera, April 3, 2013, *Yahoo! News*; "Parentes confirmam em depoimento no júri que havia ameaça a extrativistas assassinados," Alex Rodrigues / Agência Brasil, April 3, 2013, *Empresa Brasil de Comunicação*.

¹¹ "July 27, 201," 2010 suppressed news, *nightslantern.ca* [access:<
<http://nightslantern.ca/bulletin.htm#stang> >]

¹² "After decades of turning a blind eye, Peru declares state of emergency due to oil contamination in Amazon," Jeremy Hance, March 26, 2013, *Mongabay.com*.

¹³ "Will Congress Act to Stop US Support for Honduras' Death Squad Regime?" Mark

Weisbrot, April 3, 2013, *antiwar.com* .

¹⁴ Sequential background (links to *nightslantern.ca*): [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#).

¹⁵ “El plan de conquista de Monsanto enfrenta la resistencia azteca,” Laura Carlsen, Feb. 18, 2013, *ap programa de las américas*.

¹⁶ “Records Sought on Alleged Death Squad Leader,” Robert Kahn, April 3, 2013, *Courthouse News Service*; “Torture Victims in El Salvador Speak Out,” Edgardo Ayala, March 26, 2013, *Upside Down World*; “Salvadoran May Face Deportation for Murders,” Julia Preston, Feb. 23, 2012, *The New York Times*.

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