

It's been an active and dynamic year at NISGUA! From promoting ground-breaking struggles for women's and indigenous rights, to challenging the destruction wrought by open-pit mines and dams, NISGUA celebrates the accomplishments we have achieved together as a strong and active U.S. grassroots network. Our U.S. staff is now fully settled in Oakland, California, and as we mark the one-year anniversary of our move, we share with you, our loyal supporters, the following highlights of our accomplishments this year to date.

We have focused our work in three distinct yet interconnected program areas: the Guatemala Accompaniment Project, the Trade and Globalization Program, and the Justice and Accountability Program.

Guatemala Accompaniment Project

The Guatemala Accompaniment Project (G.A.P.) recruits, trains, and coordinates human rights observers throughout the country to provide a dissuasive presence against violence for at-risk human rights and environmental defenders. G.A.P. continues to be one of NISGUA's strongest and most crucial programs. In 2008, G.A.P.:

- **Supported 10 human rights observers who provide ongoing accompaniment to the witnesses in the genocide cases.** Accompaniment proved critical during this historic period when, for the first time ever, witnesses gave their testimonies in Spain and in public hearings in Guatemala.
- **Provided emergency accompaniment to over 14 organizations, two communities, and five individuals.** These include: witnesses and their supporters in Choatulúm pursuing the first-ever legal case against members of the military for forced

disappearance; the Finca Nueva Linda Pro-Justice Movement (FNL) regarding the forced disappearance of activist Héctor Reyes in 2003 and the killing of workers during violent evictions in 2004; K'amalb'e, a group in Chichicastenango carrying out exhumations of clandestine cemeteries; the Petén Distributors Workers' Union (SITRAPETEN) in their struggle for reinstatement and improved working conditions; Juana Méndez and the Institute for Comparative Studies in Criminal Science in Guatemala (ICCPG) in their successful effort to convict a police officer for rape committed in prison.

- Integrated socio-economic and environmental rights more fully into our accompaniment work. **G.A.P. placed accompaniers with groups in the San Marcos region opposed to open-pit mining; communities in the Ixcán that would be inundated by the construction of a hydro-electric dam; and a Chorti Maya association fighting the privatization of a local forest.** In addition, we observed community consultations throughout Guatemala in which local populations voted against proposed mega-development projects including oil exploration, mining, and dams.

- Played a key role in expanding the mandate of the Coordination of International Accompaniment in Guatemala (CAIG) to



NISGUA staff in our U.S. and Guatemala offices.

include **accompanying those who are at risk for their work in the defense of social, economic, and cultural rights, especially as they relate to natural resource extraction.** Furthermore, CAIG has decided to use NISGUA's existing program in the Ixcán as a model for providing accompaniment in matters of natural resource extraction.

- **Trained five new human rights observers in July, ranging in age from 23 to 66,** who will accompany human rights and environmental defenders in three regions.

- **Reported on key human rights cases and the impact of natural resource extraction in media outlets such as the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Upside Down World*.** These articles, written by

current and former companions, cover the Xalalá hydro-electric dam, the sentencing of five former civil patrollers in the 1982 Río Negro massacre, the 1981 kidnapping and forced disappearance of community leaders in El Jute, and the Juana Méndez rape case.

- **Debuted the powerful photo exhibit, "This Land is Our Land: Guatemalan Resistance to Mining and Militarism," featuring photographs by James Rodriguez** in Oakland, California during July and August. Cafe (504) and NISGUA hosted an "Art and Accompaniment" party, where local supporters of NISGUA were given the opportunity to view the photo exhibit and meet the five new companions who will begin working in Guatemala this fall.

Trade and Globalization Program

NISGUA's Trade and Globalization Program promotes indigenous rights, environmental justice, and community-based economic alternatives. Building on years of grassroots work against "trickle down" trade policies, in 2008 NISGUA strategically focused our efforts on challenging destructive open-pit mines and massive hydro-electric dams. This year, we:

- Established relationships with the Guatemalan non-profits **Pastoral Commission for Peace and Ecology (COPAE)** and **CEIBA**, as well as **grassroots organizations like the Association for Integral Development in San Juan Ixtahuacán (ADISMI).**

- **Organized successful speaking tours for two extraordinary activists who reached thousands of people** through interviews with the press, advocacy meetings with congressional representatives, and presentations held in colleges, churches, and community centers across nine states. (See tour report, page 3.)

- **Produced an urgent action in response to the criminalization of protest in San Marcos,** where arrest warrants have recently been issued against eight women for their activities against the Golcorp-owned Marlin Mine. Soon after we distributed the urgent action, Goldcorp issued a defensive press release and paid ads in an attempt to delegitimize local organized resistance.

- **Co-facilitated delegations with Witness for Peace and Fair Trade University, educating participants about the**

intersections between "free" trade, mega-projects, migration, and U.S. foreign policy. The delegates then coordinated outreach events in Wisconsin and submitted letters to the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala expressing concerns about mining.

- Initiated partnerships on natural resource issues with the Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic at Washington University and the Center for International Environmental Law. In addition, we held **collaborative strategy meetings with staff from Amazon Watch, International Rivers Network, International Accountability Project, and the Rainforest Action Network,** among others.

- Coordinated with the Stop CAFTA coalition to **produce the third annual DR-CAFTA monitoring report, to be released this fall and used as a tool to educate and lobby U.S. Congress for changes to the Central American Free Trade Agreement.** Currently, NISGUA is working with COPAE to publish a chapter about mining in Guatemala and the links between neoliberal trade policies (such as "free" trade agreements) and mining.

Tours 2008: Resistance to Mega-Projects

Fausto Roberto Valiente de León, a representative of the Pastoral Commission for Peace and Ecology (COPAE) in San Marcos, visited the West Coast and Canada. **Fausto educated activists, students, faith communities, and social movement partner groups from Austin to Seattle about the grassroots struggle to close the Marlin Mine** in San Marcos and to keep



Tour speaker Fausto Valiente addresses KPFK radio listeners in Los Angeles

it from expanding into an adjacent 26-square-kilometer area. Fausto established foundations for important transnational alliances by meeting with the General Counsel of the International Indian Treaty Council in San Francisco and delivering an energizing address to a large immigrants' rights rally in Austin, Texas.

Throughout his tour, Fausto described the damage to 87 homes near the open-pit gold mine due to blasting. He spoke about the criminalization of protest in San Marcos and the contamination of local ground water with toxins that have apparently seeped from the cyanide-leaching site. **He explained that 18 indigenous communities expressed their legal right to be consulted about this project by democratically voting against the mine in a popular referendum**, which has yet to be respected by the Canadian mining company Goldcorp or the Guatemalan government.

On May 20, NISGUA supported Fausto's attendance at Goldcorp's annual shareholders' meeting in Toronto, where he addressed shareholders about the Marlin mine's effects on the ground in San Marcos, contradicting CEO Kevin McArthur's claims that operations at the mine do not negatively impact the environment or people in the area. Afterwards, several shareholders approached Fausto to express interest in what he had to say.

Meanwhile, **Jerónimo Osorio Chen**, representing the Association of Communities for Development, Defense of the Earth, and Natural Resources (ACODET), toured the Midwest to describe the vigorous local opposition to the Xalalá hydroelectric dam in the Ixcán region. **Jerónimo, an Achi Maya from Río Negro, spoke of the social and environmental harm that the Xalalá dam would cause, including loss of agricultural lands, displacement, and damage to the ecosystem as well as the violent repression of those who oppose its construction.** He told of a massacre of 440 people – including many of his family members – carried out by the Guatemalan government against communities who opposed the construction of the Chixoy dam in the 1980s. Local communities in the Ixcán have voted overwhelmingly to reject the Xalalá project. Nevertheless, the government is currently soliciting bids from investors interested in funding the dam's construction. Jerónimo emphasized that this bidding period represents a window of opportunity to strengthen the opposition.

Jerónimo gave extensive interviews to online and print press and advocated for his community at the offices of U.S. elected officials, including a representative in the House International Relations Committee. The tour also connected Jerónimo to the Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic at Washington University in St. Louis. Law, business, and engineering students are now providing critical research free of charge on the Inter-American Development Bank's involvement and on other U.S. financiers with ties to the Xalalá dam.

"These speakers help inform us of the root causes of injustice in Guatemala. Their courage is evident and inspires us to act."

- Cheryl Sommer, NISGUA tour host 2008

People in the U.S. who attended the tours immediately took action by signing **over 800 letters asking the Guatemalan government and Goldcorp to respect the demands of the communities in San Marcos and Ixcán.** The tours educated and motivated thousands of North Americans while re-energizing Jerónimo and Fausto for the fight ahead. Additionally, tour events raised \$1,300 for each speaker's organization to support the struggle for indigenous rights and environmental defense.

Justice and Accountability Program

Through our Justice and Accountability Program, NISGUA employs strategic, creative, and coordinated grassroots activism and advocacy to pursue justice for genocide and other human rights crimes. We monitor precedent-setting cases, provide information and strategic analysis to our network and organizational partners, and advance international advocacy efforts for justice. This year, we:

- Placed a full-page paid ad in *Prensa Libre* on February 8, 2008 signed by 36 international organizations calling for an end to impunity for the crimes committed during the war. The ad specifically denounced the December 12, 2007 Constitutional Court decision to annul the extradition orders for those accused of genocide and crimes against humanity in the Spanish National Court. The ad also referenced a sign-on letter coordinated by NISGUA in which U.S. Congress members called for the enforcement of the international arrest warrants issued in Spain.

- Played a key role in coordinating, writing, and disseminating action alerts on behalf of human rights and environmental defenders. NISGUA took the lead in developing the urgent action response to a death threat against a member of the Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice and against Forgetting and Silence (H.I.J.O.S.) related to the June 30th activities commemorating the Day of Heroes and Martyrs. NISGUA

also collaborated with Amnesty International, Human Rights First, and STITCH to disseminate appeals for action around an attack against Rabinal community leader Guillermo Chen, the assassination of a union leader with the Banana Workers' Union of Izabal (SITRABI), and the issue of femicide.

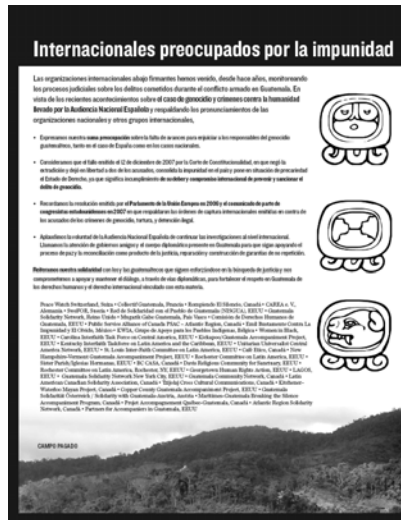
- Collaborated with the Guatemala Sub-Group of the Latin American Working Group (LAWG), a coalition of D.C.-based advocacy groups working for justice and human rights in Guatemala. NISGUA provided critical "from the ground" reports to inform the advocacy work of the Sub-Group and contributed to the joint letter being sent to Guatemala's new Attorney General expressing concerns about human rights violations, including the new wave of criminalization of protest against resource extraction.

- Provided up-to-date information and analysis about the national and international genocide cases through our web site and email alerts.

- Met regularly with the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala to urge the U.S. government to support key human rights cases and enforce the arrest warrants for defendants in the international genocide case.
- Strengthened collaboration with the "Genocidio Nunca Más" (Genocide, Never Again) coalition, which has improved our strategic

analysis and allowed us to take the lead in responding to breaking legal developments.

- Met with the International Human Rights Federation (FIDH). As a result of the meeting, the FIDH President issued an international statement denouncing impunity in Guatemala.



"Internationals Concerned about Impunity": paid ad in Guatemalan newspaper in February, coordinated by NISGUA and signed by 35 other international groups

This fall at NISGUA... We are gearing up to participate in the **Social Forum of the Americas 2008** to be held October 7-12 in Guatemala City. The forum will bring together grassroots organizations, community groups, artists, academics, and non-profit organizations to strengthen cross-border efforts for social justice. We are also launching "**House Parties for Justice in Guatemala**" to help our grassroots supporters across the U.S. invite more people into our network of amazing and dedicated people working for Justice in Guatemala. To learn more, or to host a house party, contact us!

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