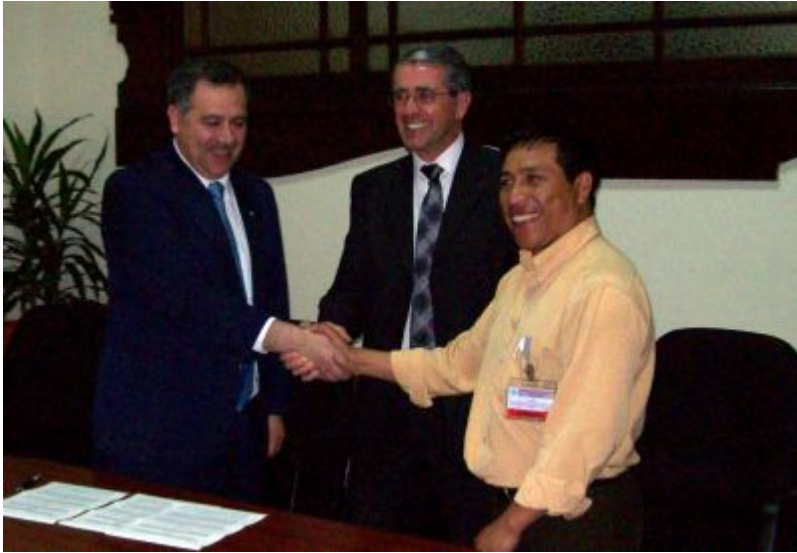

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BREAKTHROUGH ACCORD PROMISES REPARATIONS FOR GUATEMALA MASSACRE SURVIVORS



Rabinal, Guatemala: After months of delay, a new agreement between the President of Guatemala and civil society has breathed life into a long-running campaign to secure compensation for families that lost relatives during the notorious Rio Negro massacres in the early 1980s.

The accord was signed on November 20 between leaders of the relatives' group, known as COCAHICH, and President Alvaro Colom Caballeros, extending the negotiations through to June 30, 2009. COCAHICH is part of a larger community network, Adivima, which partners with The Advocacy Project (AP).

The Rio Negro massacres occurred in the early 1980s after indigenous communities were displaced by the Chixoy dam. The dam was built between 1976 and 1983 by the Guatemalan National Institute of Electrification (INDE) with funding from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

More than 440 indigenous villagers refused to abandon their land for the dam, and were killed by paramilitaries. Overall, about 13,000 people in 28 villages were affected by project, according to COACHICH. Most of the survivors live in extreme poverty.

In the new accord, the government acknowledges for the first time that "damages and violations" occurred during the dam's construction and accepts the obligation to offer

reparations. “We now expect to see concrete results and reparations for all of the damages and violations in 2009,” said a representative of COCAHICH.

The government has also agreed to work with mediators from the Organization of American States (OAS) to identify families affected by the dam and design a plan for their reparations.

“I appreciate the patience and assistance of all parties and hope that this proceeds well,” President Colom stated. “We would like to move this process forward with more than simply signatures and make sure it does not slow down.”

The negotiations began in December 2004, after hundreds of community activists occupied the Chixoy Dam. In March 2008, a political accord was signed with Dr Rafael Espada, the Vice President of Guatemala, to negotiate reparations, but the process stalled.

This prompted an outpouring of criticism from COCAHICH’s international friends, including the Advocacy Project, which sent a staff writer to profile the campaign in 2000 and has since recruited five Peace Fellows (volunteers) to work with Adivima. Heidi McKinnon, a University of New Mexico graduate who is currently volunteering with ADIVIMA, has also followed the negotiations in her [blog](#).

Vice President Rafael Espada replied in a letter to AP on September 29 of this year that the government “(takes) this project very seriously.”

If the process fails, COCAHICH plans to submit a complaint to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

- Learn more about [ADIVIMA](#)
- Read the [blog](#) of Peace Fellow Heidi McKinnon