

# **GUATEMALA - A Country Where the Defense of Rights Is Punished with Kidnapping, Imprisonment, Burial and Exile**

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Monday 7 July 2014, posted by [Riley Pentico](#)

This last 26th of June, in the northeast of Guatemala City, three leaders of the Committee of Rural Development (CODECA) were violently kidnapped by a group of people in normal dress that argued in the defense of the interests of ENERGUATE (brother to British ACTIS), distributor of electric energy in 19 regions of the country.

The kidnapped leaders are: Don Mauro Vay Gonón, co-founder and current coordinator of CODECA, Vice President Doña Blanca Julia Ajtun Mejía, and the organization's local coordinator Don Mariano García Carillo.

Several hours following the kidnapping, the National Police, in coordination with PDH and COPREDEH, made the move to liberate the victims from their captors, but immediately a lawyer from ENERGUATE appeared accusing these kidnapped leaders on a series of illegal acts committed against his company.

Upon retrieval, they were immediately taken before a local judge and declared in preventative arrest. If the victims' arrest and the freedom of their captors is a sudden dismissal of judicial logic, the thing that offensive thing that really dilutes all rationality in the judicial administration (in this country where the law doesn't come to be a simple suggestion) is that in the judicial audience, when no sufficient motives exist to imprison the aforementioned leaders, the Department of Human Services and ENERGUATE solicited a bail of ONE MILLION DEQUETZALES (125 thousand dollars) for the release of each one of the three detainees. Three million quetzals as bail for the conditional freedom of the three kidnapped and imprisoned defenders of indigene people. If this isn't ECONOMIC EXTORTION, then how could they ever win?

## **Those who keep tabs on and kidnap rights activists are no longer military**

In recent years, CODECA, has been converted in one of the main social movements articulated on both national and international levels. To the degree that the President Otto Pérez Molina came to recently identify it as: "A social cancer that expands and affects the economic interests of the country."

Why is CODECA a social cancer to the current government? Because from peasant to peasant, woman to woman, native to native, CODECA has managed to activate and accompany a social process of articulated national resistance, never before seen in the country, facing the unpunished abuses of the company ENERGUATE, which monopolized the distribution of electricity in 85% of the nation's territory.

The unpublished slogan of CODECA is: ELECTRIC ENERGY IS NOT A RIGHT, NOR IS IT MERCHANDISE. IT IS OUR DUTY TO NATIONALIZE IT. This statement is a "subversive" demand for the guard of the neoliberal system and the economic interests of the "owners" of Guatemala.

Nonetheless, CODECA, a few years ago began suggesting the urgent necessity of a summons to process a Community Constituent Assembly for the re-founding of the privatized state of Guatemala.

In other words, CODECA, has become pain in the ass, one that spurs and wakes up the sleepy and impoverished people of Guatemala. This pisses off, in some ways, the actual power groups and the state police. Thus, in the analytic logic of the power groups, CODECA should be beheaded and ripped apart. It is a bad example to the people of Guatemala that begin to rise in different areas of the country.

To this will have to be added that the company ENERGUATE, just like the hydro mines and the crop farming, has co-opted almost all the structures and institutions of the State of Guatemala. Now, the military is no longer those who kidnap or take out social figures, rather the very private agents of the companies, and the officials “democratically” elected to defend and guarantee rights are those who criminalize and persecute the defenders of rights.

Who kidnaps the top leaders of CODECA, now incarcerated illegally? And why? Why doesn't the judicial system send an arrest order for the kidnappers directly associated with ENERGUATE's interests? Why through an irrational and arbitrary manner did the Department of Human Services and ENERGUATE manage the bail of three million quetzals for the provisional freedom of the kidnapped CODECA leaders who were unjustly imprisoned thereafter?

## **What to the people is a right, to the rich government is a crime**

Ex-military Otto Perez Molina, publically accused for genocidal crimes during the civil war in Guatemala, proclaims that CODECA is Guatemala's domestic enemy, thus they should be eliminated.

During the armed conflict, the State Army assumed that the Mayan people was the actual enemy of the country, therefore, the military, criminal policies of land razing proceeded (genocide).

Now in this liquid democracy that dilutes all the rights, the defenders of individual and/or group rights are catalogued as enemies of this neoliberal State, whose destiny shuffles between kidnapping, imprisonment, burial and exile. And this doesn't only occur in Guatemala, but rather on a global level where the wounded, capitalist, western world system that devours all human rights and those of Mother Earth to in order to catch its breath, so it has time to revitalize itself.

The unpunished kidnapping and the arbitrary imprisonment of the top CODECA leaders is a siren, not only to social or communal resistance movements in Guatemala, but rather to all the ends of the earth.

Now they kidnap and want to apply the Anti-terrorist Law (whose main sentence ranges from ten to thirty years in prison) to the CODECA leaders. Tomorrow they will come for each one of us. If we don't move now, then there will no longer be a social movement or organization from which we can defend our rights when they come to take us.

Now is the time when national and international solidarity has to raise its energetic voice of protest and refusal to this systematic nullification of human rights, and the unfair imprisonment of defenders of those rights. If we don't act now, tomorrow will be too late when they come for us.

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