

Global Youth Connect

Guatemala Program Report

Human Rights Delegation for Young Leaders

June 2 – June 30, 2007

Organized in Collaboration with Organización Chico Mendez



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Guatemala in 2007

The summer of 2007 has been a tumultuous time for the post-conflict nation of Guatemala. Crime, corruption, civil unrest and human rights violations remain far too common an aspect of everyday life. Growing controversy over general elections to take place in September is reminiscent of previous elections, having already claimed the lives of thirty-nine political figures (the 2003 elections were marred by twenty-three political deaths). Nonetheless, Guatemalans are cautiously hopeful that new candidates may bring the country closer towards fulfilling the promises of the 1996 Peace Accords.

Among those running for president is Nobel Peace Prize laureate and human rights activist Rigoberta Menchú. Although polls indicate that Menchú is unlikely to be a major contender for the presidency, her campaign nonetheless carries great meaning in a country where human rights activists are systematically targeted by repressive forces. Meanwhile General José Efraín Ríos Montt, a former dictator of Guatemala who has been formally charged by Menchú and others for his role in the Guatemalan genocide, is running for a seat in Congress – despite the international warrant for his arrest issued by the Spanish court in 2006 for crimes against humanity.

In the midst of this controversy, the Guatemalan government, together with the international community, is taking new measures to address issues of long-standing impunity. Last December, a new international commission against impunity was proposed by the United Nations and the administration of Guatemalan President Oscar Berger. In a major step forward for human rights, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) was recently approved by the Guatemalan congress, despite strong opposition by Ríos Montt's powerful political party, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG). The purpose of the CICIG is to investigate and prosecute organized crime, as well as strengthen the notoriously corrupt and dysfunctional Guatemalan justice

system. Thought it has yet to be put to the test, the creation of the *CICIG* is a major step forward in combating impunity, arguably the greatest barrier to respect for human rights in Guatemala.



Carlos Sánchez of Proyecto Lingüístico Quetzalteco discusses the historical context of Guatemala's armed conflict and genocide

Despite an entrenched culture of impunity, ongoing political and social strife, grassroots human rights organizations have taken on the task of challenging powerful forces with movements to further create change – often placing their own lives at great risk. The following organizations have taken on such risks with a demonstrated commitment to building a just and democratic society in Guatemala:

- Familiares de Detenidos- Desaparecidos de Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)
- Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (HIJOS)
- Unión de Acción Sindical y Popular (UASP)
- Comisión Presidencial sobre la Discriminación y el Racismo (CODISRA)
- Iqui Balam – youth theater group
- Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG)
- Asociación Nuestros Derechos
- Organización Chico Méndez
- Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH)

Empowering Youth Leaders

With a desire to learn what historical and present-day factors have contributed to conflict in Guatemala, over the past three years Global Youth Connect has organized a series of human rights training programs aimed at empowering young leaders from both the U.S. and Guatemala to work in solidarity to promote peaceful change in Guatemala. In 2007 we continue these efforts, placing a high priority on indigenous rights. A month-long human rights delegation offered youth participants the opportunity to engage with and learn from the actions and strategies of grassroots organizations, to gain an understanding of key issues in contemporary political and human rights, and to join a growing network of youth human rights defenders through service projects.



Delegates leading a human rights workshop with Mayan youth

The delegates arrived to Guatemala with five objectives:

- To develop an understanding of the current conditions of Guatemala through site visits to human rights organizations in locations throughout Guatemala, including focused discussions on past atrocities and social and political history.
- To assess the role and responsibilities of the international community, especially the United States, in supporting human rights activities in Guatemala.
- To build awareness of the role of human rights organizations working to promote societal change for Guatemala and complex difficulties and realities they face in achieving this goal.
- To exchange ideas and learn from the experiences of young Guatemalans and contribute to efforts for change already underway in indigenous communities by participating in hands-on and collaborative fieldwork projects.
- To engage in on-going and long-term action to raise human rights awareness on issues affecting indigenous rights in Guatemala.

With these objectives in mind, participants in GYC's 2007 human rights delegation to Guatemala journeyed to communities throughout the country to explore today's human rights challenges and identify possible solutions to overcome these challenges. We aimed to create a positive impact for the human rights groups we visited, and we also sought to learn, grow, and improve our own knowledge and perspectives on human rights. Through exploring issues of social injustice in Guatemala, we once again realized the importance of collective, long-term solidarity, and the important role that young people must play to create change.

Organización Chico Méndez

Global Youth Connect believes in the importance of initiating strong relationships with partner organizations and exploring important issues collaboratively with these groups. In 2007, we partnered with a small but powerful NGO - Organización Chico Méndez.

Organización Chico Méndez is based in the Mayan village of Pachaj in the municipality of Cantel, near the highland city of Quetzaltenango (also known as Xela). The organization is guided in its work by a belief that environmental protection is a critical aspect of defending the human rights of indigenous communities in Guatemala. On a local level, Organización Chico

Méndez works to educate and organize indigenous youth to take an active role in protecting their community's land and natural resources, while struggling against the immediate threats of industrial contamination, deforestation and government efforts to privatize the community's water.



*Armando López, co-founder of
Organización Chico Méndez*

Armando López, who acted as GYC's local coordinator in Guatemala for the delegation, is a co-founder and coordinator of Organización Chico Méndez, as well as a dedicated community leader in Cantel. Armando's remarkable insight, experiences, vision and guidance provided us with a truly rich understanding of the complexities of Guatemalan society and politics in the post-conflict era. His extraordinary commitment to social justice and to his community also served as an inspiration for all.

U.S. Embassy Briefing

With an interest in better understanding the United States' role in protecting and promoting human rights in Guatemala, the GYC delegation met with David Young, a foreign service officer working in the Cultural Affairs department of the U.S. Embassy. The meeting gave our group the opportunity to better understand the U.S. Embassy's stated goals in promoting human rights in Guatemala, and to ask questions about U.S.-Guatemala relations and the U.S. policies most affecting Guatemala.

Mr. Young focused on a number of issues affecting the country including poverty, corruption, crime, and also improving economic development for the country's participation in international markets, such as promoting the implementation of CAFTA as a means of long-term economic development. We also discussed the importance of the upcoming elections, the dynamics of the political climate and the candidate's platforms.

Mr. Young discussed the difficulties of addressing poverty and economic development in a country with such extremely high crime rates, rampant corruption and widespread impunity. He stressed a pressing need to address these issues of poverty because of a steady increase in the country's population, arguing that Guatemala must become equipped to compete in international markets in order to economically sustain its growing population. Our delegates asked a number of striking questions including what roles U.S. Embassy officials play in the local political arena and how they are involved with protecting and promoting human rights. Mr. Young responded that embassy officials consistently meet with Guatemalan officials and provide training and help implement local initiatives to improve grassroots organizations as well as local government departments.

Asociación de Familiares de Detinidos y Disaparecidos de Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)

*Association of Family Members of the Detained and
Disappeared of Guatemala*

During the internal conflict in Guatemala, families and community were torn apart by the extreme repression of social justice activists, students, and union leaders and community leaders, and even more so by the total destruction of entire communities through the military's engagement in "scorched earth" anti-insurgency campaigns. Our meeting with FAMDEGUA gave us an understanding of the group's ongoing struggle to hold the government accountable for those who were disappeared, assassinated and massacred during the conflict. The group searches for those who are missing, including

locating their remains, and works to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes.



Photos of “disappeared” and murdered family members of FAMDEGUA

When asked about *FAMDEGUA*’s current rate of success with court cases and locating and identifying people who had been disappeared, they expressed that there is total lack of cooperation from the national courts regarding these cases. While there is little political will within Guatemala to identify victims and prosecute perpetrators, there has been some success in bringing cases in international courts, such as the Inter-American Court of Human rights, which has ordered the government to compensate the families of the victims of the massacres of Dos Erres and Plan de Sánchez.

Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia Contra Olvido y el Silencio (HIJOS)

Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice, Against Forgetting and Silence

HIJOS is one of the groups dedicated to confronting continued aggression against human rights activists and government impunity. Founded by children of activists who were “disappeared” during the internal conflict, this all-volunteer group uses marches, street art, and music to raise awareness for social injustice in the country. During the month of June, HIJOS was engaged in a month-long campaign called the “Memory Offensive,” which included youth arts education programming, a public forum, and the “Memory March,” designed to coincide with the celebration of Guatemalan Military Day on June 30.

Members of the HIJOS organization emphasized the importance of making fundamental changes

within the Guatemalan society by working independently from the government. And, when asked about international aid and personnel support, the group expressed an interest in only working with those sincerely interested in making real changes to current systems and structures of the country. Meeting with this organization gave our group a stronger awareness of the reality of local activists seeking structural change in Guatemala. Furthermore, we learned how contemporary human rights activists in Guatemala, such as HIJOS, are commonly harassed and targeted. The HIJOS office had recently changed locations, after being broken into and ransacked twice within the last two years.

Unión de Acción Sindical y Popular (UASP)

Union of Labor and Popular Action

Unión de Acción Sindical y Popular is an umbrella organization for a number of popular labor, peasant, survivor and student organizations in Guatemala. Among its members are the *Unidad Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala (UNSITRAGUA)*, the *Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC)*, the *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM)*, and the *Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA)*. With these groups together, UASP represents the largest confederation of popular organizations in Guatemala, dedicated to addressing the needs of farmers, workers, unions, and those affected by the internal conflict.



Armando López at a UASP meeting

Our discussions with the group centered in large part on the recent and apparently politically-motivated detention of UASP president and vice-presidential hopeful Nerry Barrios, accused of fraud in a land purchase for a group of small farmers.

We also discussed their members' personal experiences during the internal conflict which led to their conviction to dedicate themselves to making change Guatemalan in society. Our delegation asked questions regarding women's roles in the organization's current initiatives considering Rigoberta Menchú's involvement with CUC as well as her recent candidacy for president. Meeting with this group demonstrated the strength of solidarity in that this organization is one of was the most influential groups working for human rights and economic justice in Guatemala.

Comisión Contra la Discriminación y el Racismo (CODISRA)

Commission Against Discrimination and Racism

COSDISRA was created in 2002 as part of government efforts to eliminate discrimination and racism, in accordance with goals of the Peace Accords. This presidential commission, composed of five representatives from different Mayan groups and the Garífuna people, is charged with working to combat the manifestations of discrimination and racism among Guatemalans. Our group met with two of the original CODISRA commissioners, Blanca Estela Alvarado and Mario Ellington.

There were a number of questions from our group regarding the experiences of these community leaders and their initiatives to combat racism. Mario Ellington, of Garífuna descent, stated that the biggest hurdle for Guatemala as a nation is to first recognize that racism and discrimination do exist. Next, they must be confronted with measurable and specific initiatives. Exploring these problems with the commission showed us that the formation of the commission and the discussion of these issues is a significant step forward in the Guatemalan context.



Vice-minister of Culture Mario Ellington and GYC Program Assistant Edward Warner

Iqui Balam

Iqui Balam is a theater and performance group that demonstrates the power of young leaders to influence their own communities. This group consists of youth, some of whom are ex-gang members themselves, who have created an arts organization with the purpose of providing an outlet for creative expression for marginalized youth as an alternative to violent gang life. Their activities include drama performances for local schools and neighborhoods and also some street performances.



An Iqui Balam dancer performing for GYC delegates

The group discussed their experiences growing up in the poor and often violent settlement of Villa Nueva, and their activities in theater doing comedy, music, and dance. They stated that they are often targeted by the police and viewed as just another gang, despite their remarkable achievements and international recognition as an

arts organization. Meeting with this group showed our delegates an organization impacting the youth of Guatemala in a creative and hopeful way.

Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG)

Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala

During the height of the Guatemalan conflict of the early 1980s, “scorched earth” anti-insurgency campaigns killed tens of thousands of innocent Guatemalans. FAFG’s forensic work has led to the recovery of thousands of victims killed during the conflict. Through the exhumations of clandestine cemeteries and mass graves, this organization uses forensic analysis of bones, teeth, and other materials to identify the victims, as well as social anthropological research to reconstruct the events surrounding each massacre they investigate.



Delegates at a site visit to FAFG

By helping to locate and identify the remains of loved ones, FAFG has helped survivors and families reach some form of closure. We learned, however, that there has been little use of the materials discovered or remains identified as evidence in court cases to bring perpetrators to justice. Thus, although the work of this group has been essential to Guatemalan history, institutional barriers have unfortunately limited Guatemalans’ access to justice in resolving these cases.

Asociación Nuestros Derechos

Our Rights Association

The plight of street children in Guatemala has attracted international attention because these children are known to suffer some of the most egregious human rights violations in the country. *Asociación Nuestros Derechos* has run a shelter and rehabilitation center for the last twenty years, providing children with food, housing, and other services such as legal representation. *Asociación Nuestros Derechos* has reintegrated many street children back into their families.

This organization has also handled a number of court cases for street children who have been abused by police. From our discussions with director Carlos Toledo, we also found that employees of *Nuestros Derechos* are consistently in danger of police violence and that, in fact, one of their outreach workers was murdered in retaliation for his defense of street children.

Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos

Center for Human Rights Legal Action

The programs of CALDH have consistently focused on the power of legal action to protect the rights of disadvantaged populations in Guatemala. Through a number of national and international court cases this organization has served to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, women’s rights, and the rights of those affected by the internal conflict. CALDH has represented victims in critical court cases for Guatemala including the Plan de Sanchez court case that proved successful in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2004.

In discussions with lawyers and representatives of CALDH we found that there are consistent problems with court cases in national Guatemalan courts including: corruption and threats against judges, threats against witnesses and lawyers, manipulation of evidence in cases, manipulation of political and judicial processes, and a myriad of other problems within the justice system. Despite these barriers, CALDH is internationally recognized as an important institution defending the rights of citizens in Guatemala.

Human Rights Learning Community

Cantel, Quetzaltenango

As the name “Global Youth Connect” suggests, our programs place a strong emphasis on connecting young leaders across cultures and nations to learn from one another and to create shared platforms for action on critical human rights issues. This goal was exemplified in the human rights learning community that took place in a village near Cantel, Quetzaltenango from June 9-15, 2007.



Guatemalan Participants in the Human Rights Learning Community

The GYC delegates stayed with families in the villages of Cantel for the duration of the workshop. Our group slept, ate, and resided in the homes of village families, creating a truly special opportunity to learn about the everyday lives of this Maya Q’iche’ community. In the learning community, delegation participants worked cooperatively with young Guatemalan participants to explore present-day issues of human rights violations in Guatemala, within the historical context of the armed conflict.

The goals of the learning community were to:

- Enhance our knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, more generally, of “human rights” as a framework for activism
- Develop a specific understanding of the legal rights of Guatemalan’s indigenous population, in comparison with the lived

reality of human rights violations experienced by indigenous Mayans

- Work collaboratively and cross-culturally with Guatemalan participants to understand varying perspectives on human rights
- Delineate possible strategies for addressing violations of human rights
- Apply this knowledge in a practical context

The workshop activities allowed participants to learn about human rights issues affecting their respective communities and to make presentations to the group on their ideas for creating alternatives to uphold human rights. This learning community gave the delegates an interactive opportunity to explore, discuss and understand human rights.

Workshop Questions and Themes

What are human rights?

What is the significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and what are its shortcomings?

Which human rights are guaranteed in our respective countries, and which human rights are not guaranteed in our respective countries?

What are our own personal experiences of human rights violations?

What does it take to defend human rights?
What is the role of youth and what practical strategies can we employ?

How do we apply our new understandings to the context of Guatemala?

Undoubtedly, these questions resonated differently for each of us. But as the groups shared their experiences and perspectives, we began to develop common ground for how human rights can be protected and justice promoted in our home communities.



Participants involved in a team-building activity

During our first workshop day we were visited by Manuel Toj Medrano who lives in the village of Cantel, and was a former guerilla soldier for the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) during the civil war. He talked to us about the history of the armed conflict in Guatemala, his personal experiences and the consequences of being involved in the war. The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) estimates that the number of victims of the war (murdered or disappeared) is approximately 200,000. Our guest's personal experiences of the war connected extremely well with our activities that day as we had all discussed our own personal experiences of human rights violations. Many had discussed present day violations of human rights and wondered if things have truly changed. Considering the amount of suffering during the war and current conditions in Guatemala, participants asked our guest if the war had been "worth it." Our guest maintained that, in retrospect, he would have made the same choices to become involved in the guerilla movement because it was necessary to put forth demands for justice, despite the tragic consequences.

On the second day of our workshop, our invited speaker was Carlos Sánchez the director of the *Proyecto Lingüístico Quetzalteco*. He discussed the Commission for Historical Clarification and the report "Guatemala Nunca Mas" (Guatemala Never Again), two of the most important documents detailing human rights violations committed by the army during the internal conflict. One statistic from the commission report is that approximately 83% of the fully identified victims from the war were Mayan, a

fact that provided an important context for the learning community and the delegation's focus on indigenous rights in Guatemala.

The second portion of the day focused on developing an analysis of the rights of Guatemala's indigenous population as outlined by the Peace Accords, including a close examination of the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



U.S. and Guatemalan participants discuss human rights issues

On day three our group began to study the impact of mining on Guatemalan indigenous communities in order to prepare for the culminating action of the workshop: the group's participation as observers of a popular referendum on mining exploitation to take place on June 13th in the municipality of Ixchiguán. Our guest speaker was Maria Tulia, a native of San Marcos who talked to us about her experiences during the armed conflict. She also shared stories of her life as a medic for the guerrillas and the role of women during the war. The Historical Clarification Commission estimates that a quarter of the human rights violations and acts of violence committed during the civil war were committed against women. On the other hand, Maria López gave examples of how women's roles were quite significant during the internal conflict. She discussed how she initially began aiding wounded soldiers because she was at one point the only one brave enough to treat a wounded victim. Ms. Lopez's talk gave great closure to our learning workshop as our group began our training for one of our two fieldwork projects.

Observation of Popular Referendum on Mine Exploitation

On the fourth day of the learning community workshop, our delegation, along with the group of young indigenous Guatemalan workshop participants, traveled to the remote municipality of Ixchiguán in the hopes of putting into practice some of the ideas about human rights that we had explored together during the previous days.

At 3,200 meters (10,500 ft.) above sea level, Ixchiguán is situated at the highest altitude of all the populated areas of the Guatemalan highlands. The town itself is surrounded by forty-five villages and hamlets, populated by a proud and culturally rich indigenous population of Mam and Q'iche' Mayans. It is also an area rich in natural resources, including tremendous mineral wealth below the earth's surface. In recent years, the Guatemalan government has begun liberally granting licenses to international mining corporations for mining exploration, despite the disastrous consequences that open-pit and subterranean mining practices have had on the health and livelihood of local communities, due to displacement and environmental devastation. The Guatemalan government has been granting these licenses without any consultation of local communities, in direct contradiction to the rights granted to indigenous communities under the provisions of the Peace Accords.

Since 2005, indigenous communities have organized seventeen popular referendums in communities where licenses have been granted to mining companies. These referendums are done in accordance with Guatemalan law and the traditions of each community. The referendums have been designed to allow community members to voice their virtually unanimous opposition to the mines. In Ixchiguán, a referendum on the issue of mining took place on June 13. Our group participated in the referendum as official observers and witnesses of the process.

In order to prepare ourselves for our role at the political referendum, we received training from *Movimiento de Trabajadores Campesin@s* (MTC), *Por la Comisión Pastoral Paz y Ecología*

(COPAE), and the municipal government of Ixchiguán to learn how to participate as observers. Participants were given documents to fill out with their own observations and notes on the process of the political referendum, so that the legitimacy of the referendum could be confirmed by outside parties. Our delegation was divided into groups and each group was assigned to a different village or hamlet.

As we were all assigned to different areas within the municipality, our delegation observed the political referendum process in a number of different communities within Ixchiguán. The process varied to a certain extent between communities, depending on tradition and the level of organization in each community. However, each community generally adhered to the following format. During the morning, the voters in each community congregated at the local school house or communal meeting space in order to begin their process of voting. The community leaders gave point by point instructions on the issues at hand and the implications of the proposed mining. Once the community members were asked by the leaders to vote, they would raise their hands to vote for whether they were for or against the mining. Then, those who voted either signed their names or registered their finger print in the community's official registry. In each village that we visited, the communities unanimously voted against the mining in their towns. Without a doubt, our participation as observers of the referendum was one of the most challenging experiences of the delegation.



Community members at the popular referendum in Ixchiguán, San Marcos

Without a doubt, our participation as observers of the referendum was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the delegation. The weather was cold and wet, living conditions were difficult in the communities, and in many cases local community members were very wary of outsiders—especially of North Americans, whom many associated with the presence of the mines. However, it was also an incredibly powerful experience for us to see such powerful grassroots political participation of indigenous communities. Mining activity just may represent the single biggest threat to the survival of indigenous communities in Guatemala today. At the same time, it is apparent that communities are fighting back and doing all they can to defend their rights as granted to them in the Peace Accords.

Movimiento de Trabajadores Campesin@s

Following the referendum, we visited one of the organizations that had helped to coordinate the process. The MTC emerged in 1997 in the department of San Marcos as a project of the Catholic Dioceses. The aim of the organization is to support the rights of indigenous and peasant communities in the region, particularly coffee plantation workers and those affected by mining projects. As part of our visit with the MTC, we were invited for an impromptu interview on a local community radio station in the town of San Rafael called *La Voz de San Rafael* (Voice of San Rafael).



Radio interview on La Voz de San Rafael

Three representatives from the delegation were interviewed about their experiences in Guatemala and their opinions about a variety of human rights issues, including the issue of the migration of undocumented Guatemalans to the United States. While the questions addressed challenging issues, it was an exciting opportunity for us to share our impressions and express our solidarity with the long and hard struggle of the Guatemalan people for justice and peace.

Finca Las Delicias

Following the radio interview, we met with coffee plantation workers at Finca Las Delicias. The workers have organized a legal action against the plantation owner who has exploited their families' labor for generations and who is now seeking to have the workers and their families removed from the homes since firing them without cause several years ago.

Because of corruption in the judicial system and the tremendous power of the plantation owner, the case has been stalled for over six years, despite a ruling in the workers' favor. Meanwhile, they are forced to seek work as day laborers on neighboring plantations (those from which they have not been blacklisted for their organizing activities), at which they receive a salary of approximately \$3 a day for a full day's work -- less than half the legal minimum wage in Guatemala.



Coffee plantation workers at Finca Las Delicias

A previous GYC delegation to Guatemala had met with this same group of workers nearly one year ago and we were saddened to learn that the workers' cause had seen little advancement in the time that had elapsed. Nonetheless, they continue to struggle to win what is rightfully theirs and we are inspired by their perseverance in the face of such overwhelming obstacles.

Proyecto Piedrín

Our group then traveled to the costal region of Guatemala to observe and discuss one aspect of child labor in Guatemala. In the town of San Felipe, in the department of Retalhuleu, we met with a case worker from Proyecto Piedrín, a project of Centro EcuMénico de Integración Pastoral (CEIPA). Nancy Hermosilla is not only a case worker for Proyecto Piedrín, but also an alumna of the 2006 human rights learning community facilitated by GYC. Proyecto Piedrín aims to provide education, health services, and vocational training and scholarships to working children and their families. The program is dedicated to minimizing child labor in the production of *pedrín*, a type of gravel commonly used in construction. Many children drop out of school because they must work long hours for little money to extract gravel from the region's riverbeds, in order to contribute to the family income. Because of Proyecto Piedrín and their commitment to ending this form of child labor, many of the children who once worked in *pedrín* in this region are able to receive a basic education while contributing to their families' meager incomes in a less dangerous line of work.



GYC delegates visit a worksite on the bank of the Samalá River in Retalhuleu

Fieldwork Projects

On June 18th our delegation began our fieldwork projects once again in the village of Pachaj in Cantel. Delegation participants worked in teams to develop a series of human rights workshops for secondary school classes. They completed these training classes between the days of June 19th and June 22nd. The learning community workshop a week prior provided the delegates with a methodology and framework for designing their own programs for the secondary school classes. The topics ranged from systemic and interpersonal oppression and discrimination to health and sexuality, and from the education system to issues in the workplace. The delegates used discussion, creative presentations, practical demonstrations, and interactive team-building activities to explore these issues with the students. The fieldwork project had a strong impact on the secondary school students and the delegates demonstrated great teamwork as they worked cooperatively with the Guatemalan students.



Delegate Isaac Holeman with a Guatemalan participant in Cantel

The second fieldwork project consisted of the group's contribution to the Organization Chico Méndez reforestation project, which is a fundamental element of the organization's work. Reforestation is a means by which community members can actively participate in protecting the

community's cultural patrimony and the most valuable of natural resources—the clean drinking water whose source is the mountain and the surrounding forested area.



Participant Nichole Thomson planting trees in the Cantel forest

Working side by side with some of the young members of the *Organización Chico Méndez*, our group planted countless seedlings in the tree nursery, as well as one hundred and nineteen small trees along the outskirts of the Cantel forest. Even more importantly, we gained a sense of appreciation for the vital importance of protecting the community's most valuable natural resources—clean air and water—the most basic of all human rights.

Santa Anita Coffee Cooperative

Some members of our group also had the opportunity to visit the the Santa Anita coffee cooperative as part of an ecotourism project promoted by an organization called *Café Conciencia* (or “Conscious Coffee.”) During this optional excursion, delegates visited the community of Santa Anita La Unión as to learn about the cooperative's production of fair trade organic coffee and to participate in the community's ecotourism project. The community of Santa Anita is comprised of ex-combatants turned organic farmers in the post-war period. They are committed to the tenets of fair trade and environmental consciousness. *Café Conciencia* is an organization that promotes fair trade coffee and local sustainable development, as well as international solidarity with consumers dedicated

to fair trade and other issues of economic and environmental justice.

NISGUA

Network Solidarity with the People of Guatemala

NISGUA is a U.S.-based organization that works to support the efforts of grassroots movements in Guatemala. In the U.S., the organization works educate and mobilize U.S. citizens to take action on foreign policy that impacts human rights in Guatemala. In Guatemala, the organization provides accompaniment to human rights defenders and affected communities who may be under threat for their activism.

We met with Bridget Brehen, Coordinator for the Guatemala Accompaniment Project, who was able to help our group deepen our understanding of both the complexity and importance of working in solidarity with Guatemalan human rights defenders. In part as a result of this meeting, our delegation discovered new ways to approach post-delegation solidarity actions and how to stay involved in Guatemala once we return to our respective homes in the U.S.. Most importantly, we gained an understanding of the importance of connecting social justice initiatives in Guatemala with struggles for social justice within our own communities in the U.S..

Next Steps

Fundraising for *Organización Chico Méndez*

Inspired by the work of our partner organization, GYC's delegation members decided that they would fundraise to benefit a new and exciting project of *Organización Chico Mendez*. In part through the sponsorship of *Proyecto Lingüístico Quetzalteco*, *Organización Chico Méndez* has been given the opportunity to expand their organization to include a language school and training center dedicated to promoting environmental awareness. The language school would serve as a mechanism for generating funds to sustain the work of the organization, including the reforestation project and other educational programs with youth and adults. The's groups's fundraising goal was set at \$4,000, which would provide *Organización Chico Méndez* with

sufficient funds to purchase a plot of land upon which to construct the new language school (the actual construction costs are to be covered through the sponsorship of Proyecto Lingüístico). As of the writing of this report, the group has achieved approximately 50% of its goal allowing Organización Chico Mendez to put a down payment towards purchasing the land!

Education and Awareness

Together, the group brainstormed a number of ways to promote awareness about Guatemala in our respective home communities—through film screenings, letters to friends and family, public speaking engagements, sharing photos, social networking websites, T-shirts, benefit concerts, workshops, editorials and newspaper articles. Given the tremendous influence of the United States on Guatemala economically and politically and the historical role of the U.S. in supporting the perpetrators of human rights violations during the conflict, our delegation reflected on the particular importance of raising awareness about the issues we explored during the program. Not only do we owe it to our Guatemalan friends and colleagues, but also to ourselves, as we come to terms with our own role as young human rights activists in the United States.

Guatemalan Workshop Participants

Juan Jocol Pérez
Eduardo Lorenzana
Filomena Carolina Colop
José Bernabé Colop Chuc
Gladis Chojolán Colop
Sulma García Sacalxot
Ingrid Chuc López
Carmen del Rosario Yac
Nancy Carolina Menchú
Jamie Antonio Morales
Julieta Griselda Yac
Edilberto Antonio Colop

GYC Delegation Participants

Claudia Bautista

As a sophomore at UCLA, Claudia is studying political science and international development studies, with a minor in labor and workplace studies. Born in Mexico, she moved to the U.S. during her childhood years and has since developed a passion for social justice issues. Through her participation in BruinCorps, a branch of AmeriCorps, she tutors middle school children in under-resourced schools and plans family involvement events and civic engagement projects that promote the community's commitment to its youth's education. She is also a member of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán and a facilitator of La Raza Youth Empowerment Project. Claudia plans to attend law school after graduating from UCLA, and envisions herself working with a non-profit organization that deals specifically with immigration-related issues.

Crista Cornavaca

Crista is currently a junior at Pennsylvania State University, studying Spanish and international politics. Having recently returned from a semester abroad in Argentina, she is looking forward to returning to a Spanish-speaking country where she can develop her communication and project organization skills. Coming from a Nicaraguan family, she feels particularly drawn to the Central American region, where she hopes to learn more about human rights and how they are viewed and addressed outside of the U.S. In the future, Crista hopes to become fully fluent in the Spanish language, and go on to graduate school with a focus on international relations or a related field.

Kelley Crites

Kelley is currently a student at the University of California at Berkeley, where she is studying international development studies with a minor in Spanish. Due to her college's academic flexibility, she has been able to tailor her studies to fit her individual interest in Latin America, which has lead her to conduct extensive research on Central America, particularly on Guatemalan and Nicaraguan history. Kelley has also volunteered with the Foundation for Sustainable

Development in Peru, in addition to traveling to Costa Rica, Spain, and Mexico extensively. Through her participation in the Guatemala delegation, Kelley hopes to expand her knowledge of human rights as a fundamental part of democracy, personal empowerment, development, and poverty eradication. In the future, she is considering joining the Peace Corps or working for an NGO, in addition to attending graduate school.

Isaac Holeman

Isaac is currently a sophomore at Lewis & Clark College where he is double-majoring in biochemistry and molecular biology, in addition to pursuing a minor in political economy. On campus, he serves as an organizing member of the Health, Culture, and Society club that he helped create. He also co-facilitates a social medicine reading group and is a student coordinator at the Leadership and Service Office. In addition, he works extensively with the Archimedes Movement, a growing grassroots movement dedicated to promoting universal healthcare in Oregon and beyond. Isaac worked in a research lab prior to going to Honduras, where he engaged in language study and volunteered at a free clinic, working with patients on issues of nutritional health and hygiene. He has traveled extensively in Europe, and visited Belize and Guatemala. He plans to study overseas in Cuba in the fall and, after graduation, he hopes to pursue a career in academic medicine and international development.

Jeremiah Johnson

Jeremiah is currently a senior at Creighton University studying international relations and Spanish. On campus, he works in the Department of Classics, Near Eastern Studies, and Modern Languages. He is also a youth care worker at the Uta-halee & Cooper Village, where he implements therapeutic methods of conflict resolution in his work with troubled youth. Although he is deciding between attending graduate school or law school, Jeremiah hopes to remain focused on the development of informational technologies in third world countries. He firmly believes that the spread of information can become the new means through which to improve the quality of lives of

individuals living in developing nations. To that end, he would like to develop an online program that would lower the price of schooling and improving the quality of educators.

Astrid Krogstad

Astrid is currently a freshman at Fairfield University. She is actively involved in the College Democrats of Connecticut, and serves as the managing editor for the college's newspaper, Salmagundy. She has studied abroad in Cadiz, Spain for two weeks, where she engaged in language and culture immersion classes. She has also been a participant at the National Student Leadership Conference on International Diplomacy. Fluent in French, she frequents the country to visit family, in addition to having traveled to Peru, Brazil, Tunisia, and Italy. After a course she took on international human rights in high school sparked her interest, Astrid has been motivated to study the global history of genocide and its growing implications today. In the future, she looks forward to joining the Peace Corps.

Jamie Levato

After graduating from the State University of New York at New Paltz with a degree in elementary education, Jamie is currently employed at the Mid-Hudson Migrant Education Outreach Program as a tutor and advocate. Her work includes giving supplemental educational support and instruction to the children of migrant agricultural workers, and advocating on behalf of parents within the school system. She also works as a case manager for Spanish-speaking pregnant and parenting teens at the YWCA of Ulster County. In the past, she has taught summer school to migrant children and ESL to Middle School students in Poughkeepsie, NY. Jamie has also completed her master's degree in literacy education, and has twice been a Green candidate for the Ulster County Legislature. She is deeply committed to the pursuit of social justice, and hopes to direct this passion towards future plans of community organizing and coalition-building.

Carlos Livingston

Carlos currently attends Washington University in St. Louis where he is studying international relations. After transferring to Washington University, he soon became the Transfer

Orientation Coordinator to facilitate the transition period for other transfer students. He is a member and forum leader of his college's Social Justice Center, through which he helps coordinate campus-wide forums on social justice issues, and is a member and Abortion Clinic Escort through his school's Pro-Choice Student Group. He has also organized an on-campus forum on the human rights aspects of illegal immigration. Carlos has studied Spanish in Mexico through a summer language program, and hopes to work for grassroots human rights organizations in Latin America after he completes his undergraduate studies and before going on to study international law.

Courtney Nikolay

A student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Courtney is currently studying international studies and Spanish, in addition to being interested in peace studies and Latin American studies. A transfer student from University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, she was formerly a Resident Life Office Assistant, and a Learning Volunteer with a local high school, where she functioned as a teacher's aid in a Spanish-speaking classroom. Courtney has also worked with Project International as a TEFL teacher in England, and has traveled to Portugal, France, Ireland, England, and Germany. She hopes to join the Peace Corps after completing her undergraduate studies, and pursue a career in human rights advocacy.

Joy Menet

Joy is now pursuing a degree in Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian studies with a certificate in integrated liberal studies at University of Wisconsin-Madison. After taking time off to work as an Experiential Educator for nearly three years, she has resumed her undergraduate studies with a deep passion and commitment to working with children. On campus, she is actively involved in various activities, which include leading a student-run group that looks to promote racial and ethnic awareness, and facilitating team-building workshops to foster trust, conflict resolution, and communication. In addition to pursuing activities geared towards her social justice interests, Joy also works as a Lab Assistant and Animal Care Provider. She is

looking forward to spending a semester in Ecuador, and hopes to move to Guatemala upon completing her undergraduate studies to work with underprivileged youth.

Angélica Molero

Peruvian-born and raised in the U.S., Angélica is currently a sophomore at Bard College, studying political studies and Latin American and Iberian studies. She is a volunteer instructor through her college's ESL program, teaching English language skills to residents of the local community. On campus, she is a Peer Counselor working in conjunction with the Office of Residence Life to supervise two residence halls, and is a Peer Tutor for students that are learning and perfecting their Spanish skills. Angélica plans to study abroad next year, spending one semester in Cusco, Peru to gain valuable insight into her heritage, and then another semester in Bahia, Brazil to expand her understanding of Northeast Brazilian life and culture. Although unsure of her plans upon graduating, Angélica possesses a strong commitment to social justice, and hopes that her experiences in Latin America over the next year will help define her future goals.

Iyayi-Osazeme Oyegun

After being enrolled at Waterford Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa, Iyayi-Oswazeme is currently attending Barnard College. Although she is still undecided about her course of study, she is deeply passionate about social work and human rights, particularly as they relate to women and their education. While at Waterford Kamhlaba, she was very involved in community service and outreach programs. In the U.S., she has also interned at Lerch, Early, and Brewer Chtd., in addition to serving as a pastor's assistant, and being a youth ministry assistant at Bethel World Outreach Church. Iyayi-Oswazeme is fluent in Portuguese and Afrikaans, in addition to speaking Spanish and Swahili.

Brittany Rice

A junior at Alma College, Brittany is pursuing a degree in Spanish and communications. On campus, she is currently the publications and alumni relations coordinator at an international sorority, which allows her to maintain her

commitment to community service. She also serves as captain for her college's Relay for Life team, and has volunteered with Habitat for Humanity. Brittany has spent a month studying in Argentina, and a semester in Ecuador and Peru studying language, civilizations, and national current events. In addition, she has traveled to Nicaragua, England and Wales, France, and Spain. She plans to join the Peace Corps upon completing her undergraduate studies, and hopes to eventually pursue a career in communications.

Nichole Marie Thomson

Nichole is currently a senior at Florida State University studying political science and international affairs. In addition to pursuing rigorous coursework in these disciplines, she is a Legislative Research Aid for the Florida Times-Union, engaged in conducting research and fact-checking of state political news. Nichole has also interned at the South American Embassy Headquarters in Washington D.C., where she recorded and translated embassy meetings and conducted event planning for the Colombian Embassy. She has traveled extensively to Colombia, and is fluent in Spanish. Nichole hopes to take the necessary steps in the next few years to prepare for a successful political career in the future. However, she also firmly believes in gaining real world experience to truly grasp the challenges of underdeveloped nations, and hopes to travel the world before continuing traditional classroom higher education.

Rachel Watson

A sophomore at Sewanee, The University of the South, Rachel is pursuing a degree in international relations. On campus, she is an Environmental Resident and an Assistant Proctor in her resident hall, and a varsity athlete participating in Track and Field, Swimming, and Diving. She has traveled to Japan on an exchange program, to Ecuador with her peers as an Outreach Volunteer, and served as an English Instructor in Peru. She looks forward to attending law school after completing her undergraduate studies to specialize in International Human Rights law. She is hoping to come away with a greater understanding of the challenges faced by Guatemala's indigenous populations after participating in this summer's delegation.

Project Staff

Emma Kreyche

*Latin America Program Director
Global Youth Connect*

Emma comes to GYC with a history of activism and community organizing experience. As a child, her family's involvement in the Sanctuary Movement exposed her to the painful realities faced by Central American war refugees, an experience that deeply has deeply impacted the course of her life. In high school and college, she volunteered with Amigos de las Américas for three consecutive summers in Mexico and Bolivia, and has since traveled extensively in Latin America. While pursuing her BA in Latin American Studies at Bard College, Emma became deeply involved in the global justice movement and co-founded the Migrant Labor Project, promoting student involvement in direct service, research and advocacy around the issues faced by local migrant workers. After graduating, Emma settled in the Hudson Valley to continue her work with farm workers and low wage-immigrant workers. She now calls the Hudson Valley home and remains actively involved in local economic justice issues and anti-racist activism. In addition to her work with GYC, Emma conducts training workshops for organizations, schools, and individuals around the themes of racism, white privilege and community organizing. She is also a community mediator for the Mediation Center of Dutchess County. As Latin America Program Director, Emma oversees GYC's programs in Guatemala, El Salvador and Venezuela.

Armando López

*Co-Founder, Organización Chico Méndez
Quetzaltenango, Guatemala*

Armando is indigenous Maya Quich'e and co-founder of *Organización Chico Mendez*. He currently works on a volunteer basis with *Organización Chico Mendez*, coordinating the organization's reforestation project and working with local youth leaders to protect the vital natural resources of Cantel. Armando's environmental activism has taken him throughout Guatemala and to other parts of Central America. He lives in the village of Pachaj with his wife and five children.

Edward Humphrey Warner

Guatemala Special Project Assistan

Global Youth Connect

Edward joins GYC as Special Project Assistant for the Guatemala delegation with extensive human rights activism and leadership experience.

After receiving his B.A. in political science at the University of Maryland, he is currently completing his Master's degree in intercultural communication with a focus in Spanish at the same institution. A former GYC participant that joined the Guatemala delegation in 2005, he has since been engaged in various outreach activities. For example, he has served as a volunteer income tax assistant, preparing tax returns for Spanish-

speaking clients, and is currently employed at *Snider and Associates*, where he functions as a paralegal. In this capacity, he serves as a Spanish translator, prepares depositions and evidence for Latino clients, and organizes documents for representation of clients in arbitrations and hearings. He is currently awaiting the publication of an article he co-authored with his mentor and advisor, Dr. Jeffrey Davis in the *Journal of Human Rights*. Throughout the course of this first project for publication, Edward analyzed and researched the testimonies of victims from Guatemala's civil war and presented the work at the 2006 Latin American Studies Association Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico.