



International Rivers Network
Linking Human Rights and Environmental Protection

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Landmark Study Documents Legacy of World Bank-funded Chixoy Dam

Washington, D.C.— July 26, 2005. Indigenous Mayan leaders from Guatemala today delivered the results of a two-year investigation into the legacy of the Chixoy Dam to the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The *Chixoy Dam Legacy Issues Study* was coordinated by Dr. Barbara Rose Johnston, an anthropologist from the Center for Political Ecology in Santa Cruz, California. The 5-volume study, completed in March 2005, is the most comprehensive documentation of damages sustained by a World Bank-funded project and provides recommendations for restoring the livelihoods of the affected communities.

Both the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank financed the construction of the Chixoy Dam during years of violent internal armed conflict in the 1970s and 1980s. Some 3,500 residents were forcibly evicted without adequate resettlement and compensation, and 400 people – mostly women and children – were massacred for refusing to move.

“This study is very important for us as it documents all that we have suffered over the past 20 years as a result of the dam. We’re here in Washington DC to deliver this report to the World Bank and the IDB and urge them to take part in a negotiation process to address the legacy of the Chixoy Dam. The World Bank, the IDB and the government should take responsibility for their actions. We want our lives restored and to live with dignity,” said Carlos Chen Osorio, a speaker for the affected communities.

The study recommends the creation of a negotiation process that results in a legally binding reparation agreement between the government, communities and the funding institutions. Recommended elements of that agreement include: restoration of lost productive land; the provision of potable water and electricity; economic development programs; and reconciliation and reparation for the violence that accompanied the construction of the dam.

“The legacy of Chixoy includes extreme poverty and immense suffering caused by inept development, corruption and violence,” said Dr. Johnston, the author of the study. “If this is the legacy of the past, this study and its recommendations comprise a blueprint for the future, a future that promises reconciliation and propels the communities and Guatemala towards the restoration of a healthy and dignified way of life.”

Earlier this month, dam-affected peoples presented the report to Frank La Rue from the Presidential Commission for Human Rights in Guatemala. The government has

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established a high-level Damages Verification Commission to assess the damages caused by the Chixoy Dam and come up with a process for negotiating reparations for the affected communities. The Commission is comprised of representatives from the Guatemalan President's office, the Secretary-General of Planning, INDE (the National Electrification Institute), and the affected communities. The World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank have also been invited to join the Commission

"The recent formation of the Damages Verification Commission is an important step toward achieving a resolution in this matter. Justice has been delayed for far too long for dam-affected communities. We are pleased that the Guatemalan government has recognized the legitimate concerns of our clients and has established a commission to consider their claims in order to reach a just and equitable settlement," said Enrique Gomez-Pinzón, the attorney heading up a team from Holland & Knight LLP who are representing the affected people in the negotiations.

The complete study can be downloaded at www.irn.org, or www.centerforpoliticecology.org.

For more information, or to arrange interviews with the representatives of the Chixoy dam-affected communities and Dr. Barbara Rose Johnston, contact:

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