

What is accompaniment?

NISGUA is one of many organizations around the world that employs accompaniment as a vital tool in the global struggle for the respect of human rights. In the Guatemalan context, accompaniment creates a non-violent response to the threats, harassment, and violence faced by survivors of Guatemala's 36-year-long civil war and grassroots organizations working for justice and human rights. To this end, NISGUA's Guatemala Accompaniment Project (G.A.P.) places long-term volunteers side-by-side with people in rural communities and with organizations in an effort to deter human rights violations. The dissuasive physical presence of these volunteers, known as accompaniers, provides a measure of security and creates space for Guatemalan communities and groups to organize in defense of their rights. Accompaniers also monitor and report on the human rights situation and alert the international community to abuses.

Who does G.A.P. accompany?

Association for Justice and Reconciliation: In 2000 and 2001, a courageous group of war survivors filed charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against former military dictators Efraín Ríos Montt and Romeo Lucas García and their military high commands in the Guatemalan court system. The witnesses in these cases formed the Association for Justice and Reconciliation and requested international accompaniment. G.A.P. has responded to this request with accompaniers in the Ixcán, Ixil, and Rabinal regions.

Grassroots Organizations: Since the beginning of 2000, threats and direct attacks have increased against Guatemalan labor unions, indigenous groups, exhumation teams, and other organizations working for justice and human rights. In response to this situation, NISGUA initiated its Organization Accompaniment Program. An accompanier

based in Guatemala City, with previous experience accompanying in the rural communities, responds to short-term requests for accompaniment by organizations and individuals.

How does G.A.P. work?

There are 3 key parties involved: accompaniers, the groups/individuals we accompany, and the sponsoring communities in the U.S. Sponsoring communities, which may be a religious group, a committee or an organization concerned about Guatemala, provide the resources and energy that make ongoing accompaniment possible.

G.A.P. coordinators hold accompanier trainings twice a year. After volunteers have undergone training, G.A.P. matches each accompanier with a placement in Guatemala and a corresponding U.S. sponsoring community. The sponsoring community supports an accompanier who lives in rural communities with a partner for a minimum of

six months. Benefits include accommodation and food in community, a small stipend, health insurance, a re-entry stipend and contribution toward international travel.

G.A.P. accompaniers receive support on the ground from the in-country G.A.P. coordinator and work within an international accompaniment coordination representing some ten different countries. Each sponsoring community has an urgent action network to respond to human rights abuses in the Guatemalan communities.

On return to the United States, the accompanier engages in speaking events and other educational activities in conjunction with the sponsoring community. Sponsoring communities and returned accompaniers participate in NISGUA's grassroots efforts to promote social and economic justice in Guatemala.

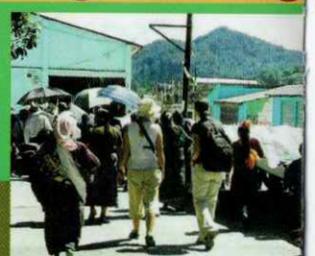
Why is accompaniment necessary?

In the early 1980s, the Guatemalan military combined urban repression with a rural counter-insurgency campaign that uprooted more than a million people – many of whom fled to neighboring Mexico – and led to an estimated 200,000 dead and disappeared. According to the independent Historical Clarification Commission, acts of genocide were committed against Guatemala's indigenous population.

In 1993, organized groups of refugees began returning home and internally displaced groups started to come out of hiding. Two years later, G.A.P. formed in response to requests from these returnees for trained international observers to accompany communities as they rebuilt after 36 years of violent civil war, which formally ended with the signing of peace accords in 1996.

As the returned communities grew stronger, the need for accompaniment diminished. At the same time, more individuals and organizations began stepping forward to denounce the atrocities of the past. In a deteriorating human rights climate, their actions, along with ongoing impunity in Guatemala, put them at a high level of risk for human rights violations. Recognizing this, members of communities and organizations involved in such efforts requested accompaniment, and G.A.P. responded by gradually shifting our mandate to accompany them.

**Accompaniment is: Witnessing. Monitoring and reporting. Embodying international
Serving as the eyes and ears of the international community. Acting as a meg**



Photos: Jonathan Moller and NISGUA archives

"Through conversations with surviving community members I have begun to suffer and to be afraid, while simultaneously having the conviction and
- Ellen Moore, Genocide Case Accompanier