



## Uncovering the Real Root Causes of Forced Migration: Members of "The Squad" Visit Honduras and Guatemala

This year, NISGUA took trans-territorial organizing to a whole new level. In March, we welcomed U.S. Congress members **Rep. Ilhan Omar, Rep. Cori Bush, and Rep. Jamaal Bowman**, as well as representatives from the offices of **Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Chuy García** to Guatemala to learn about the real root causes of forced migration: neoliberal resource extraction, state corruption and impunity, violence and criminalization against Indigenous peoples and human rights defenders, and more.

### The Delegation at a Glance

- 5** sponsoring organizations: Witness for Peace, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), School of the Americas Watch, and NISGUA, with support from the Institute for Policy Studies - Global Economy Program.
- 8** representatives from U.S. Congress, including four Congresspeople (Rep. García joined the Honduras leg of the trip) and four congressional advisors.
- 9** days of travel and learning, five in Honduras and four in Guatemala.

The delegation started in Honduras, where the representatives met with newly elected President Xiomara Castro, and visited the grave of world-renowned Lenca water protector Berta Cáceres, who was assassinated in 2016. Berta's organization, the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), shared about their ongoing resistance against a U.S.-backed hydroelectric project.



During a visit with the Fraternal Black Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH), **the three members of the Congressional Black Caucus made connections about the impacts of the war on drugs, militarization, and state violence in Black communities in the U.S.** Finally, the delegation also met with popular social movements from El Salvador, including youth, students, survivors of the armed conflict, environmental organizers, unions, feminists, and queer folks.





## Meeting Survivor and Transitional Justice Organizations

During their first day in Guatemala, the delegation met with our partners at the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR), Center for Legal Action on Human Rights (CALDH), and Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Guatemala (FAMDEGUA). Partners gave updates on legal cases regarding crimes against humanity committed by the U.S.-backed Guatemalan state in the 1980s, including two Ixil genocide cases and the Military Diary case, which includes charges of disappearances, sexual violence and other crimes against humanity.

**“It was very important to present FAMDEGUA’s work to the Congresspeople: the continuity of 38 years searching for our relatives, and our position regarding the closure of the peace institutions. It seems to me that they were very shocked by the exhumations and the Military Diary case, especially the need to find the remaining fugitives of this case. It would be good to have continuity on these conversations with U.S. Congresspeople so that we can keep them informed on the cases. I would also want to continue conversations on document declassifications and on the real interventions of the U.S. and its support of human rights violations.”**

**-Manuel Antonio Farfán, President, FAMDEGUA**

At our partners’ request, Judge Pablo Xitumul spoke with the delegation about attacks on judicial independence, only two days after being removed from his position by the Guatemalan Supreme Court of Justice. Human rights groups, international organizations, and social movements widely recognize this removal as a blatant act of criminalization towards Judge Xitumul, who has issued historic sentences in the Molina-Theissen transitional justice case and the “Magic Water” corruption case against former Guatemalan Vice-President Roxanna Baldetti.

**Judge Xitumul’s removal forms part of an alarming pattern of attacks against independent judges and prosecutors** orchestrated from the Guatemalan Attorney General’s office in alliance with political and economic actors whose interest is to maintain impunity and corruption.



## Black Lives Matter and Xinka Sovereignty: Solidarity Between Struggles

“The delegation’s visit brought great energy to the people in the Escobal resistance. Things like the visit help us keep the people active and the spirit alive.”

- Amalia Lémus, Coordinator, Diocesan Commission for the Defense of Nature (CODIDENA)

NISGUA organized a visit to Xinka territories to meet with our partners at the Xinka Parliament and the Diocesan Commission for the Defense of Nature (CODIDENA) who are in resistance against the Escobal mine.

We heard from Doña Paty, who faced down militarized Guatemalan police while holding hands with her young daughter, knowing both that they faced great violence from their own government, but also that they could not live without the water that is threatened by the mine. We heard from Luis Fernando, who almost died as a teenager when Tahoe Resources’ private security shot him and other peaceful protesters. We heard from Doña Blanca, whose house was destroyed and whose community was declared unlivable due to the explosions from the mine beneath them. We heard from Julio, who survived an assassination attempt just last year. And we heard from Alex, whose daughter, Topacio, was murdered for resisting the mine when she was 16-years-old. In this emotive exchange, our partners expressed their concerns about the Guatemalan-court-ordered consultation process underway with the Xinka people, which must be free of pressure, coercion, and intimidation.



The delegation also visited a peaceful check-point where the resistance has maintained 24 hour shifts for over five years in order to stop vehicles from illegally entering the mine. The delegation was received by nearly 200 members from the peaceful resistance in Santa Rosa, Jalapa, and Jutiapa. After hearing about the terrible physical, emotional, and cultural impact that the Escobal mine has had on the region, the Congresspeople made powerful speeches about the connections they felt to their own struggles for Black life and dignity in the U.S. Several resistance members expressed how **the delegation was an important act of official solidarity, but especially an act of human empathy that left the community charged with the energy to continue.**

**NISGUA was invited to speak about the delegation at Rep. Omar’s report back in May! Our speech focused on the Escobal resistance. Check it out at [bit.ly/repomarevent](https://bit.ly/repomarevent)**





## ¡Sí a la Vida, No a la Minería!: A Visit to the Peaceful Resistance La Puya

Members of the Peaceful Resistance La Puya met with the delegation at their permanent protest camp, which they have maintained for ten years at the entrance to the Progreso VII Derivada mine, owned by Nevada-based mining company Kappes, Cassidy & Associates (KCA). **Local community members expressed their commitment to defend already scarce water resources from the devastating impacts of mining, and shared experiences of criminalization and police repression.** They also underscored the injustice of the arbitration suit that KCA has brought against the Guatemalan government for over US\$400 million under the terms of the Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) with the United States. Invoking CAFTA-DR, the company argues that the government treated it unfairly for suspending its mine given lack of consultation with the community, and for not repressing the resistance sufficiently. It is an injustice that the company can even bring such arbitration because the project is illegal, lacking the necessary permits, and was imposed on the community through state violence.

You can read more at [bit.ly/lapuya](https://bit.ly/lapuya).

**“I feel that the delegation’s visit inspired confidence in us, knowing that there are still people who can support us. It showed us that not all people are bad, that there are those who are willing to help. The visit gave us hope that our words will be heard.”**

**- Felisa Muralles, Defender of Life, Member of the Peaceful Resistance La Puya**

**Rode Diaz captured all the beautiful pictures that you see in this report. Rode is a NISGUA board member who provided invaluable support for the delegation. You can find his work at [rodediaz.com](https://rodediaz.com) and [iximchemedia.com](https://iximchemedia.com)**



*Yesenia from CISPES reads a map at La Puya to Rep. Ilhan Omar.*

### Why was this delegation so important?

- 1.** With the Biden/Harris administration pushing for privatization and corporate investment to “solve” the root causes of forced migration, we need a powerful counter-narrative from U.S. elected officials with on-the-ground knowledge to demonstrate that this approach will actually make life more difficult for people in Central America.
- 2.** The delegates made dozens of concrete commitments for policy follow-up. For example: declassification of documents; cutting harmful U.S. military, police, and “development” aid; meeting with Vice President Harris, etc. Having their support is crucial for responding to the demands of our partners.
- 3.** All of the people the delegation met with are facing serious threats for their political work. The accompaniment model holds that perpetrators of violence are more likely to attack or criminalize human rights defenders without attention from outside the community or country. Thanks to the delegates sharing about our partners on their platforms – which have a larger reach than NISGUA – would-be perpetrators are now aware that U.S. Congresspeople know about our partners, the legitimacy of their work, and will respond if they are threatened.