



"Acknowledging the crime of genocide affects all Guatemalans because in addition to the concrete harm done to the victims and their families, genocide has also damaged the social fabric for all Guatemalans."

– Excerpt from 2013 Genocide Verdict



Members of H.I.J.O.S. paste photos of their disappeared loved ones in the streets of Guatemala City. (CPR-Urbana)

18 Years Seeking Justice in the Courts

By the time prosecutors first launched genocide investigations in 2000, thousands of Guatemalans had already contributed to a UN truth commission that found the state had committed acts of genocide during the Internal Armed Conflict. These survivors were among the first to break the silence about what they had endured under brutal U.S.-backed military governments in the 70s and 80s. Over twenty years later, their courage has multiplied, their stories joined by thousands more in a robust public movement for truth, memory, and accountability.

In the movement's most public moment, a dictator was convicted of genocide, and the world watched as survivors made history against great odds, winning a verdict that continues to shape the trajectory and meaning of justice in Guatemala and beyond. In NISGUA's many

years accompanying communities in these struggles, we've learned that **verdicts are neither the end nor the beginning, and no one case tells the whole story.**

Long before survivors bring their stories to the courtroom, communities organize to articulate, plan, and carry out their search for justice, knowing that their work will continue long past a trial's end and that their contribution will live to inform future struggles. Taken as a whole, their organizing reveals the devastating scope of state violence and its many impacts, while highlighting the profound need for healing, memory, and cultural change. Today, we invite you to learn more about how survivors are using a legal system that has often served as a tool of repression to chart the course for deep and lasting transformation.

By the numbers...

1954: year U.S.-backed coup ousted democratically-elected President Jacobo Arbenz

36: years of internal armed conflict

1996: year the Peace Accords were signed

200,000: people killed

626: recorded massacres

2000: year the AJR filed the first-ever genocide case in Guatemala

45,000: people forcibly disappeared

> 1 million: refugees displaced, largely to Mexico and the U.S.

12: years survivors had to wait to see Ríos Montt stand trial

2013: year ex-dictator Ríos Montt found guilty of genocide

2: days average travel time for survivors to attend court dates

45: high-ranking military officers or special forces charged with genocide and/or crimes against humanity since 2000

16: people on trial who graduated from the School of the Americas

207: NISGUA volunteers who have provided human rights accompaniment to survivors

> 20,000: responses to Urgent Actions by NISGUA members since 1981

980,000: Guatemalans living in the U.S. in 2015





BREAKING THE SILENCE,

COMMUNITIES ORGANIZE FOR JUSTICE

MATERIAL AUTHORS

Survivors organize to bring former military commissioners and members of the Civil Defense Patrols to justice for carrying out forced disappearance, massacres, and other crimes against humanity.

SEE: **PLAN DE SÁNCHEZ**

INTELLECTUAL AUTHORS

Survivors denounce those responsible for giving the orders and creating the conditions for genocide and crimes against humanity to be carried out, including former dictators and their military high commands.

SEE: **LUCAS GARCÍA, RÍOS MONTT**

2013:

GUILTY OF GENOCIDE

Former de facto dictator Efraín Ríos Montt declared guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity, a global first in a national court. Ten days later, the verdict is effectively annulled, sending Montt to retrial. Survivors uphold the validity of the 2013 verdict and participate in retrial proceedings, declaring their truth once more.

2018: A GLIMPSE AT

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

- Survivors resolve to continue their fight for justice following the April 2018 death of **Efraín Ríos Montt**. "He died guilty, awaiting a retrial. History will remember him that way." - Statement by the AJR
- A verdict is expected in the trial against **José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez**, the first former head of military intelligence to be prosecuted for genocide.
- Trial dates continue in the **Military Zone 21** case, the largest case of forced disappearance to date in Latin America. High-ranking military officials face charges of forced disappearance and, pending acceptance of evidence, sexual violence.
- 36 Achí women** from separate communities in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, bring charges against former military commissioners for sexual violence, illegal detention, and torture during the armed conflict.

"We are carrying this fight forward and are doing it for three generations. First, for our loved ones who passed. I believe they are content with us and they will be able to finally be at rest. Second, we are doing this for the survivors, so their souls can be healed. The third generation is our children who are watching the path we are taking. They will learn from us and one day when we are gone, we will have left them with the path towards justice."

— Board Member, Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR), in the lead-up to the 2013 verdict



DECADES OF COURAGEOUS DETERMINATION OPEN THE DOOR FOR NEW LEGAL VICTORIES TO BE WON



FORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Families whose loved ones were forcibly disappeared organize to denounce the terror tactics employed by the military and national police; they fight to find the remains of the estimated 45,000 people disappeared.

SEE: **CHOATALÚM (2009), MILITARY ZONE 21 (ONGOING)**

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Survivors bravely testify to having suffered systematic sexual violence and sexual and domestic slavery as part of a military strategy to destroy community organizing and target women as life-givers.

SEE: **SEPUR ZARCO (2016), ACHÍ WOMEN (ONGOING)**

BEYOND THE COURTROOM: CALLS FOR DIGNIFIED REPARATIONS

Communities have identified access to education, health care, and land as essential components of justice. Seeking lasting impact, they fight for reparations for ongoing physical, psychological, and economic impacts of the violence they survived.

Photos from left to right: People from the community of Choatalúm meet with human rights lawyer Edgar Pérez as the first case of forced disappearance goes to trial (Credit: Amanda Kistler); A banner reads, "626 massacres committed by the military. No to militarism!" (Credit: NISGUA); An Ixil woman looks at photos of burials on display outside the courtroom in Nebaj where witnesses testified against Rodríguez Sánchez (Credit: NISGUA); Former and current members of the Board of Directors of the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (Credit: Graham Hunt)