

Breaking the Silence

2018 Year in Review

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Breaking the Silence (BTS)
Rompiendo el Silencio (RES)

COORDINATOR UPDATES



Message from BTS Maritimes Coordinator Stacey Gomez:

Dear members,

2018 marked my first year of working with BTS and it was filled with lots of first-time moments, as well as learning. Here are some highlights!

Through the May delegation, which I co-led with Lisa, I had the wonderful opportunity to meet many of BTS' long-time partners, including from the Rabinal Legal Clinic and the Highlands Small Farmers Committee (CCDA). I joined delegates in hearing and seeing first-hand the incredible work they are doing in

Guatemala, as well as learning a lot about the intricacies of the fair trade plus coffee production process, permaculture design, and so much more.

Another highlight was our two epic speaking tours. I feel so privileged to have accompanied Congresswoman Sandra Moran and Marcelo Sabuc of the CCDA and proud of the work we do in bringing their important voices to communities throughout the Maritimes. Sandra coupled an insightful political analysis, with hope filled music and spoken word poetry. Marcelo's visit, on the other hand, allowed us to delve deeper into the issue of access to land and defense of territory. At each stop, we read the names of the six CCDA members who've been assassinated since 2016. This work inspired us to adopt "Land rights are human rights" as a focus in 2019.

2018 also marked the one year anniversary of the Hogar Seguro tragedy. We joined calls for justice for the 41 girls killed and 15 survivors through the launching of a postcard and social media campaign. Several local committees participated. We were able to build on this work to make it even bigger in 2019!

We also grew our social media reach in 2018, with the aim of amplifying stories from Guatemala and our partners, as well as solidarity actions. A key focus for me was also strengthening our media presence in the Maritimes.

In short, 2018 was about planting seeds, which are now bearing fruit. It's been great deepening connections with all of you, and working with such a lovely group of people.

Best,

Stacey Gomez

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Message from BTS Guatemala Coordinator Lisa Rankin:

Friends,

2018 was a difficult year for human rights defenders in Guatemala, with the United Nations documenting 39 assassinations and almost 900 attacks against defenders in 2017 and 2018. This deeply marked my work in Guatemala over the year. The assassinations of five members of the CCDA, as well as assassinations of members of sister organization Small Farmers Development Committee (CODECA) once again shed light on the dangers of defending land and territory.

Another human rights defender assassinated in 2018 was Estuardo Quevedo, a compañero in Casillas, Santa Rosa. Estuardo was an active opponent of the Escobal mine, at the time owned by US-Canadian company Tahoe Resources (now Pan American Silver). He was one of the main organizers of his community's turn at the peaceful encampment in Casillas, which halted all mine related traffic and effectively shut down the mine. He is remembered for his commitment to the struggle in defense of his community.

2018 was also marked by the Guatemalan government's attempts to end the UN-backed Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) which has been essentially pushed out of Guatemala for their investigations of powerful elites, including president Jimmy Morales and his family. BTS wrote and participated in various actions in support of the CICIG over the course of Fall 2018, with deep concern over the attacks against the Commissioner Ivan Velasquez, who was ultimately barred for re-entering Guatemala. At the height of the power struggle between the Guatemalan government and the CICIG, army tanks took to Guatemala's streets and intimidated embassies and CICIG staff. By January 2019, the office was significantly weakened and with no international staff.

In May, BTS staff facilitated a human rights delegation to Guatemala with members of the BTS network. We had the opportunity to visit our partners and learn more about their struggles in the resistance. One particularly impactful moment of the delegation was attending the 40-day wake of Hector Manuel Choc-nephew of human rights defenders Angelica Choc, Maria Choc and Ramiro Choc. He was attacked in April and later died from his injuries. They are from El Estor, an area affected by the Fenix Nickel mine (formerly owned by Canadian company Hudbay Minerals) and monocropping. No one has been arrested for Hector's death.

I was also invited to attend a Solidarity Festival event in El Estor in October, to raise awareness around the criminalization of human rights defenders in the community, including Maria Choc, Abelino Chub and fish harvesters from the community who have denounced contamination of Lake Izabal. Circus perform-



Photo: Altar memorializing Estuardo Quevedo

ers and musicians from other resistances in Guatemala travelled to the community for a truly memorable afternoon of acrobatics, fire breathing, stilts, documentaries, musical performances and more.

Another highlight of 2018 was connecting coffee producers in the community of Mataquescuintla, Jalapa to coffee roasters in Victoria who are now selling their coffee throughout Canada. The relationship began after the roaster read an article about Alex Reynoso and the Reynoso Pacheco family in the LA Times. The article tells the story of the life and assassination of their daughter, Topacio Reynoso, who was a vocal opponent of the Escobal mine. I supported the journalist in her visit in November 2017, and she put the roaster in contact with me and the Reynoso Pacheco family. The roasters travelled to the region in early 2018 and began buying not only their coffee, but coffee from other producers in the resistance in Mataquescuintla, Jalapa. I have been supporting the relationship with translation.

In 2018, I also had the honour of presenting the 3rd Annual Topacio Reynoso Pacheco Youth Award to the Movimiento AJODER (Association for Development and Social Recovery) which is a youth organization based in Coban, Alta Verapaz. Movimiento AJODER uses art and political action to promote human rights, and in particular the rights of youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples. The group used the \$1000 prize to increase capacity for audiovisual technology and community communications in the defense of land and territory.



Photo: Granting of Topacio Reynoso Youth Award to AJODER with Reynoso Pacheco family

In 2018, it was important to keep positive aspects of my work at the forefront, like work with coffee producers and the Topacio Youth Award as a source of hope, in a context of such a precarious life and death situation for human rights defenders. As we move into the 2019 Guatemalan elections, there is no doubt regarding the continued importance of international solidarity with human rights defenders in Guatemala, as well as recognizing the systemic root causes to these issues.

In solidarity,

Lisa Rankin

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SPRING SPEAKING TOUR & AGM WITH SANDRA MORAN



Thirty years after her first visit to the Maritimes, Sandra Moran returned to the East coast in June 2018, this time as BTS' invited guest for our annual speaking tour and AGM. Sandra, who first visited the Maritimes as a member of the revolutionary musical group Kin Lalat, is an accomplished musician, an advocate for LGBTQ, women's and Indigenous rights, as well as the first feminist and openly lesbian Member of Congress in Guatemalan history. The speaking tour took place from June 15-23rd, 2018.

During the speaking tour, Sandra visited Tatamagouche, Antigonish, Halifax, Moncton and Charlottetown. At each stop, Sandra energized audiences

with her drumming and moving spoken word poetry. She also presented the powerful documentary "In my own voice," which weaves together her story with Guatemala's history. Audiences also heard updates about the current situation in the country.

Throughout the tour, Sandra spoke about the 2015 protests against corruption, which succeeded in their demands of having President Otto Perez Molina and Vice President Roxanna Baldetti resign. Sandra reported that 620 people from the Perez Molina, as well as previous government were in jail on corruption charges awaiting trial.

Sandra was among three candidates from the leftist *Convergencia* party to be voted in during the 2015 elections. The party brought together feminists, students, farmers and Indigenous peoples. Sandra said, "People wanted something different, so they voted for us." During her time in office, Sandra spearheaded legislative work in defense of women and girls' rights, as well as LGBTQ rights. Sadly, this made her a target for the right-wing political groups, with Sandra being subjected to death threats, attacks on social media and even legal action for her work.

A lot has changed in the thirty years since Sandra's last visit. But, as Sandra highlights, a constant is the importance of international solidarity in Guatemala's struggle for human rights. As Sandra spoke about the killing of seven *campesino* organizers from the Highlands Committee of Small Farmers (CCDA) and Small Farmers Development Committee (CODECA) over the course of about four weeks, she stressed, "We need voices everywhere to say that we don't want more killings or harassment of defenders."

On each leg of the speaking tour, participants wrote solidarity messages on a banner for the CCDA, which was given to the organization. We also took solidarity photos, shared online.

Sandra was the 2018 recipient of the Southern Speakers Symposium Fund. Thanks to the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation for their support! Thanks also to all of our members and supporters who made this speaking tour a success!

To read more about the speaking tour, visit us here: <http://bit.ly/2Wfu3Kb>

FALL SPEAKING TOUR WITH MARCELO SABUC OF THE CCDA



From November 4-11th, Marcelo Sabuc of the Highlands Committee of Small Farmers (CCDA) spoke throughout the Maritimes regarding threats against human rights defenders in Guatemala and the deteriorating political situation in the country. During the speaking tour, Marcelo visited Antigonish, Halifax, Wolfville, Sackville, Fredericton, Charlottetown and Tatamagouche. At each stop, community members expressed their solidarity with the CCDA and the 21 human rights defenders who were assassinated in 2018.

The CCDA, one of the leading Indigenous agrarian organizations in Guatemala, supports 30,000 Indigenous small farmers throughout the country in struggles for access to and defense of land and territory through advocacy, the production of coffee for export and the promotion of sustainable agriculture. The CCDA has enabled small Indigenous farmers to access and reclaim 76 plantations. Their important work has made them the target of repression from the time of Guatemala's internal armed conflict to present.

We began each of our visits with a commemoration of the six CCDA members who've been assassinated since 2016. Five of them were killed in 2018. Each was a community leader engaged in struggles for access to and defense of land:

- Daniel Choc Pop from San Juan Tres Rios - Killed June 8, 2016
- Samuel Chub from Xyaal Kobe – Killed February 27, 2018
- Gumercindo Butz from Chiguoyo – Killed March 2, 2018
- Jose Can Xol from Choctun Basila – Killed May 10, 2018
- Mateo Chaman Pau from San Juan los Tres Rios – Killed May 13, 2018
- Ramon Choc Sacrab from Ixloc San Pedrito – Killed June 1, 2018

Another threat faced by the CCDA and social movements in Guatemala is criminalization. According to Marcelo, three CCDA members are currently in jail and another 308 have arrest warrants for their political work. Marcelo also spoke of Bernardo Caal, a Q'eqchi community leader engaged in resistance to hydroelectric projects, who was sentenced to about seven years in prison on November 9th. Marcelo noted, "The only way we can achieve our vision for structural transformation is to continue to struggle, even though there are risks."

Marcelo critiqued the role of Guatemalan security forces in backing megaprojects such as transnational mining, hydroelectric dams and the expansion of monoculture (eg. palm oil and sugar cane) operating without the consent of local communities. The military was responsible for much of the violence against the population during Guatemala's internal armed conflict. Marcelo noted, "While the budget for the public autonomous University of San Carlos is being slashed, military funding has significantly increased. We are supposed to be in a time of peace. This is a contradiction."

Marcelo ended his talks by emphasizing the importance of Canadian solidarity with Guatemala. He shared, "Our ancestors had a saying: we all have to walk together and let no one be left behind. Lets walk forward together."

COMMITTEE UPDATES

BTS Antigonish Committee

It's about relationships! In Antigonish, we continued to make meaningful connections and participate in projects with groups in our community, our region, and Guatemala.

Our committee took BTS's intentional approach to solidarity with Indigenous struggles in this unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, with members participating in the Mi'kmaqi Water Walk along the Shubenacadie River organised by Grassroots Grandmother and Water Protector Doreen Bernard.

In October, members participated in a reading of selections from the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. During the many events we participated in and/or organised over the year, it was moving and impactful to recognize again and again the connections between struggles for justice North and South. The June visit by

Guatemalan Congress member Sandra Moran and the November visit by Marcelo Sabuc of the Highlands Committee of Small Farmers (CCDA) deepened our analysis of how racism, colonialism, and capitalist greed combine to create toxic and unjust situations like the Alton Gas project or the Escobal mine. Events with both speakers were well attended and sparked lots of questions as well as local media coverage. In



Photo: Sandra Moran and Stacey Gomez present to a full house in Antigonish in June.



Photo: Local committee member Amy Brierley (left) is with participants in the walk, as well as with organiser Dorene.

March, our participation in the #NosDuelen56 campaign included an address to the crowd at the International Women's Day March. St Francis Xavier University student Meghan Miles spoke about the Tina Fontaine and Colten Boushie cases in Canada in relation to the deaths of 41 girls in the Hogar Seguro fire.

Relationships with other Antigonish groups and BTS fundraising go hand in hand. In addition to selling crafts and coffee throughout the year at various markets and fairs, we partnered with Social Entrepreneurship students at StFX to increase sales in the Winter and Fall terms. We sold brewed coffee at the Friends of the Antigonish Library book sale fundraiser (June), and also the Antigonight Art After Dark festival

(September). This was the second year running for our participation in these events, both looking like annual partnerships! At Antigonight this year, we also presented a participatory art-making event called “Art That Speaks Truth to Power,” where we helped youth and adults create buttons, a banner, and protest placards with messages of justice, anti-racism and inclusivity.

In October we participated in the 12th annual Antigonish International Film Festival (AIFF), sponsoring the film “500 Years,” and providing brewed BTS coffee, snacks and crafts on a donation basis. The AIFF, a longtime ally, also cohosted the showing of “Finding Oscar” in April as a BTS fundraiser. Both Antigonight and AIFF are examples of how fundraising and education/advocacy can come together in one great event! Other fundraising notes include the May Bluenose Marathon 10km run by the intrepid Sarah Armstrong, and the StFX Association of University Teachers’ donation towards the Silver Threads Fund, to promote diverse participation in BTS delegations. Thank you everyone for your efforts this year.

As a local committee, this year we formally thanked two Antigonish cultural institutions for their ongoing support of BTS coffee. The Tall & Small Café has brewed BTS since 2004, and has welcomed countless BTS events over the years. It felt like completing of a circle of relationships to have Marcelo Sabuc speak at the Café, and meet customers and the owner, Meghan Peters. The St. James United Church Women have for 5 years been using BTS coffee for all their events. Relationships like these, with groups, organisations, and businesses, are a meaningful part of our work in Antigonish.



Photo: BTS members create “Art That Speaks Truth to Power” at Antigonight: Art After Dark festival in September.



Photo: Craft sales at the St. James United Info Fair: a chance to thank the UCW with a small gift for the kitchen!



Photo: BTS Antigonish member Janette with owner of The Tall & Small Café Meghan Peters and Marcelo Sabuc of the CCDA

BTS Fredericton Committee

Hosting Marcelo Sabuc from CCDA

Marcelo Sabuc, National Coordinator of CCDA, spoke at Conserver House in Fredericton on Nov. 8.

BTS Fredericton Members on Delegation

Longtime BTS Fredericton member Sophie Lavoie and local community organizer Jenn Wambolt participated in the 2018 Delegation to Guatemala. Sophie and Jenn attended the April Pre-Departure orientation in Tatamagouche where they met other participants. They also organized fundraising events such as a draw on a basket and coffee sales to help fund travel to Guatemala, with the support of the Fredericton group.



Potluck with BTS Delegation participants

BTS Fredericton heard from members Sophie Lavoie and Jenn Wambolt about their participation in the May BTS delegation to Guatemala at a potluck at Conserver House in June. Sophie and Jenn provided updates from BTS' partners. Jenn as well as BTS Fredericton member Joan McFarland also provided updates from the BTS AGM. One of the highlights for them was meeting Sandra Moran.



Popcorn Fundraisers

BTS Fredericton members organized popcorn and fair trade chocolate sales at the 48-Hour Film Competition in October and the Silver Wave Film Festival in November. Funds went to the BTS Staffing Campaign!

Supporting newcomers

BTS Fredericton members have been supporting two newcomer families with precarious status settle in Fredericton. The members have organized food, clothing and monetary donations as well as provided with the family with other love and support, including a "Welcome to Fredericton" party last September.

Ongoing

Members are selling Breaking the Silence Just Us coffee and chocolate.

BTS Halifax Committee

The Halifax Local Committee continues to sell BTS Coffee every Saturday morning at the Forum Market. A dozen members rotate shifts on Saturday. Thanks to Suzanne Litke for leading this great initiative and to all the volunteers who contribute their time. In total, we raised \$6800 in 2018 which goes towards the BTS Staffing Fund!



Photo: One year anniversary celebration at the Forum Market!

We were also part of the tour featuring Sandra Moran in June. She shared her beautiful poetry and showed her documentary "In my own voice." In November, we hosted Marcelo Sabuc of the CCDA, who spoke about the ongoing attacks on farmers and land protectors in Guatemala. There was a good turnout for his talk at Dalhousie.



Photo: Public event with Sandra Moran



Photo: Public event with Marcelo Sabuc (CCDA)

BTS North Shore Committee

In the first half of 2018 we focused on our co-sponsorship of the New Hope School-Tatamagouche School/Community Project. In particular, we focused on supporting and preparing the high school students and adults who visited the New Hope School in Rabinal at the end of August. This included offering a workshop on BTS solidarity in the areas of mining injustice, fair trade and education. In total, seven high school students and nine adults participated in the visit, including BTS North Shore members Terri Lynne Reid, Hannah Martin, Anne MacDonald Martin, Paul Martin, Wilf Bean, Kathryn Anderson. Former Interns Nelly Marcoux and John MacPhail were wonderful interpreters and added greatly to the experience for us all. We supported the fundraising efforts by the students, as we were able, including support for a community Guatemalan supper.



extraordinary hospitality we received from the students and staff of the New Hope School and Foundation, including the organizing efforts of Sandra Lopez, Director of the New Hope Foundation.

Two students and a teacher are set to visit Tatamagouche from May 23rd to June 6th, including attending the BTS Annual Gathering.

The visit to Rabinal and Rio Negro was a meaningful experience for all, as we deepened the relationship with the New Hope School in a way that is not possible on the briefer visits by BTS delegations. The group was able to interact with New Hope students on a daily basis, both in classrooms and in school activities. A very significant experience for all was a weekend visit to Rio Negro and the site of the March 13th, 1982 massacre, accompanied by 8 New Hope students whose families are from Rio Negro. We are deeply thankful for the

BTS PEI Committee

We have a core group of about six to eight people who meet on a regular basis. Our public events bring out 20-30 people.

Over the year of 2018 we were involved with a number of activities to increase our knowledge of Guatemala and work in solidarity to the extent we can.

In March we welcomed Eric Gilberto who shared his experiences in Ecuador, Honduras and Guatemala where he has been involved for a long time. Eric and his family live in Victoria, PEI where they own and operate a chocolate factory. He said that it may be possible that we could do a joint fundraiser with BTS.



Maureen went on a BTS delegation to Guatemala in May, with eight other delegates. “We travelled across the country and spoke to many groups and individuals. It was an impactful trip and a time of intense learning” says Maureen Larkin, participant. The danger of being an activist in Guatemala was brought home in a shocking way when we heard that during the time we were there, three leaders of CCDA were murdered.

On her return, Maureen made several presentations on Guatemala and attended the BTS Annual Gathering. She was welcomed back with a meal at Myrna/Jim’s home.

Sandra Moran was the guest speaker for the BTS Annual Gathering. She also did a Maritime tour accompanied by BTS Maritimes Coordinator Stacey Gomez. Sandra was an excellent resource person and had a profound analysis of the roots of the current crisis in Guatemala. Sandra also renewed some old acquaintances from her KinLalat days in the late 70’s.

At the May meeting someone brought up the idea of having a walk on the Confederation Trail over the May holiday weekend. After some discussion we decided to go ahead. We did a 10-kilometre walk from the farmers’ market in Cardigan to the restaurant at Georgetown. The participants enjoyed the event and we’re doing it again in 2019.

In November, we welcomed Marcelo Sabuc of the CCDA and staff member Stacey Gomez. We partnered with the Mawi’Omi Centre to sponsor a public presentation on Marcelo’s work with CCDA. Marcelo was also warmly welcomed at the VRC Volunteer Recognition breakfast that morning.

We wrote letters and made phone calls to our MPs and Hon. Chrystia Freeland, then Minister of International Trade calling for the creation of an Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise.

PARTNER UPDATES

Highland Committee of Small Farmers (CCDA)



For folks at the CCDA, it is difficult to speak about positives when reflecting on 2018. There were many assassinations with no investigation, as well as criminalization of human rights defenders and members of the organization. Three more CCDA members from the same region are currently in jail on trumped up charges.

The CCDA continues to support communities in the struggle for access to land and the protection of territory from megaprojects. One of the communities they've supported to gain access to title, Don Pancho located on the Volcan de Fuego. The community was not severely impacted in the June 3 eruption where

thousands of people were unofficially reported killed in the aftermath. Don Pancho was not severely impacted by the eruption but the CCDA also supported communities more impacted, including El Rodeo and La Reina, though they are not affiliated with the CCDA. The CCDA's experience working with communities in devastating circumstances including extrajudicial evictions and the mudslides in San Lucas Toliman proved to be vital knowledge in the aftermath. Currently, the community of Don Pancho is considering relocating out of fear for further volcanic eruptions.

The CCDA has also been working on a collaborative project with the National Guatemalan Women's Union (UNAMG) with training workshops for women in the Quiche, as well as an agricultural school for youth.

Of course, the CCDA continues to support coffee farmers with fair prices and access to international markets. As many already know, the CCDA lost their organic certification in 2017 but is hopeful to regain in the coming year. They continue to supply conventional coffee (not organic) to buyers in Canada, the US and Europe.

Finally, the CCDA continues to be active in the political sphere at a national and local level. Congress member Leocadio Juracan, the former national coordinator of the CCDA, has continued his support of communities protecting land and territory, and plans to run again in the June 2019 elections. They also expect more people from the CCDA to run for local and national positions.

Mesoamerican Institute for Permaculture (IMAP)



Photo: IMAP Staff, Gregorio Ajcot

IMAP continues their vital work for the protection of seeds and support for local farmers in new ways, while also using ancestral knowledge to improve their practices. They offer workshops throughout the year for local small holder farmers and separate workshops for international participants.

The seed house at the IMAP offices in Patulul continues to operate by exchanging, buying, selling and in some cases, like community or school gardens, IMAP donates seeds to protect and promote the usage of heritage and creole seeds in Guatemala.

IMAP has also expanded their production and commercialization of amaranth products, renovating the former kitchen to serve as an industrial quality kitchen for amaranth grains and bars, as well as atol.

Finally, the volunteer program with IMAP continues to be in full swing, welcoming guests onsite to support the work of IMAP and the many day-to-day tasks of keeping the centre running smoothly!

Rabinal Legal Clinic (the *Bufete*)



Photo: *Bufete* staff in Rio Negro with Lisa Rankin, BTS Guatemala Coordinator

The struggle to advance the case of sexual violence against 36 Achi women during the Internal Armed Conflict made major strides in 2018. In May 2018, six former civil patrolers were arrested on charges by eight women who have identified the men as their attackers. After they were indicted on charges of crimes against humanity, the accused were not granted bail. The trial then moved into the evidentiary phase, with a number of delays, including the appeal of a decision by the presiding judge, Claudette Dominguez in August, who ruled that the Guatemalan State would not be included as an accused in the case. This was despite the fact that the accused were former civil patrols and the crimes occurred during the Internal Armed Conflict. The appellate court decided in favour of the prosecution and the Guatemalan State was included in the case.

There have been a number of challenges in bringing this case forward. The women have been receiving threats from the family members of the accused, as many continue to reside in the same communities. The women's names were released by the judge, despite the fact this is a sexual violence case and there was a request by the prosecution of an embargo due to the possibility of threats against the women. While some women have left their communities because of these threats, others have remained due to family commitments and lack of resources.

Another challenge has been a lack of will on the part of the Public Prosecutor to charge intellectual authors who were in power at the time these crimes occurred (1981 to 1985). Currently, only the civil patrollers are on trial, which marks a step backward since the focus is only on the material authors of the crimes. However, the Public Prosecutor has said they are waiting for the evidentiary phase to pass before requesting arrest warrants for the intellectual authors.

The Rabinal Legal Clinic is also representing four criminalized human rights defenders from Purulah. In total, seven men were accused of usurpation and other crimes by a large land-owner. Five of the men were found guilty, including the four men represented by the *Bufete*, and were sentenced to paying Q5 per day for two years. The judge recognized the ridiculousness of the amount of land owned by the accuser stating that criminal proceedings were not the adequate manner to resolve land disputes.



Photo: Criminalized men from Purulah

New Hope Foundation (NHF)



Photo: NHF students work on a puzzle.

This year, 60 young people graduated from the NHF's program of Rural Development and Well-Being Program, the fourth year of the program. The middle school program is continuing, and 24 students graduated this year, despite continued funding concerns.

The NHF is also developing relationships with other organizations, including support from Oxfam for a program to strengthen the participation of young women in school, which is of constant concern for the NHF. The institute wants to ensure that young women who are studying at the middle school level have the opportunity to go to highschool, with financial support and scholarships.

The relationship with St. Francis Xavier University and the students from Ghana, as well as the Tatama-

gouche Twinings Project and a new relationship with KAIROS has brought a lot of energy to the school. Student are having lots of opportunities for exchange and especially in adapting the KAIROS blanket exercise to tell “The Story not Told” focused on the true history of Rabinal.

The impacts of climate change were felt in Guatemala this year. A drought during the rainy season led for many of the school’s crops to be destroyed.

The funding challenges continue and a priority for the NHF in the coming year is to ensure the continued participation of young women in school, as well as continued educational opportunities.



Photo: NHF students learning to weave

Communities in resistance to mining

Resistance to Escobal mine in Santa Rosa and Jalapa

In September 2018, the Constitutional Court in Guatemala ruled that the Guatemalan Ministry of Energy and Mines did not consult with the Indigenous Xinka people affected by the Escobal mine. This decision set in motion a consultation process which has since been unclear and overshadowed by the Guatemalan government’s continued racist attitudes towards the Xinka people and the belief this process is merely a formality. The decision also marked the removal of the encampment at the Guatemalan Constitutional Court, where community members had taken 24 hour turns for eleven months.



Photo: Encampment in front of Constitutional Court

The ancestral authority of the Xinka people, the Xinka Parliament, denounced numerous incidents over the fall of 2018 of Tahoe Resources attempting to influence the consultation process, despite a ruling by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights that companies, as their motivations are purely lucrative, can not participate in the consultation process.

Due to direct action from community members combined with the Constitutional Court’s decision regarding the consultation of the Xinka people, the Escobal mine has been suspended since June 2017, causing major losses to Tahoe Resources. In late 2018, the company announced they would be absorbed by Canadian company, Pan American Silver, one of the largest silver mining companies in the world. They

were able to purchase the Escobal mine for free with the purchase of four other projects, despite the Escobal project's recognition as one of the largest silver deposits in the world. It is important to recognize that the direct community action, in addition to the suspension of the project by the Constitutional Court, effectively destroyed Tahoe Resources.

The process for consultation is continuing with the definition of the Area of Influence of the project. Community leaders have continued to be criminalized for speaking out against the company, and Quelvin Jimenez-the lawyer for the Xinka Parliament-has received threats for his work in support of the communities.



Photo: Xinka Parliament and the resistance to the Escobal mine

Resistance to the Fenix Nickel Mine in El Estor, Izabal



Photo: Members of the BTS delegation visit human rights defenders in El Estor

Back in 2017, Mynor Padilla, head of security for the Fenix Nickel Mine at the time under the ownership of Hudbay Minerals, was acquitted for the assassination of Adolfo Ich Chaman, husband of Angelica Choc, and injury to German Chub. The decision was overturned in a court of appeals in September 2017, and there will now be a retrial, with no new date set. A year after the decision, the request by the UN-backed Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala and the Guatemalan Public Prosecutor to remove judge Ana Leticia Pena Ayala's immunity from criminal prosecution was granted, due to criminal acts committed during the trial. The process is currently ongoing.

The criminalization of human rights defenders from El Estor continued in 2018. In January, Maria Choc, sister of Angelica Choc, was arrested on trumped up charges, stemming from her translation support of Q'eqchi' communities in the struggle for land rights. She is currently out on bail and waiting for upcoming court dates.

Fish harvesters who have protested the contamination of Lake Izabal due to the practices of the Fenix Nickel mine continue to be criminalized as well. Eduardo Bin, vice president of the local fish harvesters guild, was illegally detained in June 2018 and has been in pre-trial detention since that time. Cristobal Pop, President of the Guild, members Tomas Che and Vicente Rax, and journalist Carlos Choc, have all

been charged for illegal detentions. Cristobal Pop has also reported being followed.

The cases are of continued concern, as criminalization of human rights defenders in the area has not abated. The struggle for the protection of the land and territory against megaprojects of Q'eqchi people continues.

Cerro Blanco Mine in Asuncion Mita, Jutiapa

The Cerro Blanco mine, built and formally owned by Goldcorp, was bought by Canadian junior mining company Bluestone Resources in 2017. Nicknamed, “the Mine that was Born Dead”, the project, which would affect the main water source in El Salvador, the Lago Guija, has never gone into operation due to an inaccurate Environment Impact Assessment which did not take into account the high temperatures in the mine’s tunnels. However, with the purchase of the project by Bluestone, new concerns over attempts to restart the project have arisen. The company is attempting to get the approval of a feasibility study on the project, to then look for financing, stating that they have all the permits necessary to restart operations.



In December 2018, Member of Congress Leocadio Juracan called a congressional hearing with the ministers to discuss the project and the impact on water at the local, national and international level. The Ministry of Energy and Mines has stated the company does not have the necessary permits to restart operations.

The local church has led the opposition to the project, and is gathering more information on the new company with support of organizations including BTS.

Photo: Congressional hearing on Cerro Blanco mine. Credit to the office of Leocadio Juracan.

PARTNER MEETING

In December, BTS held our first partners' meeting in over two years. It really was a wonderful opportunity to connect, as well as share organizational and personal struggles, particularly as all organizational representatives were women. Yvette Michaud from the Halifax committee, as well as BTS Maritimes Coordinator Stacey Gomez, were able to join the meeting as well.

The meeting focused on partners who will be receiving volunteers through our (re)newed program for volunteers: the BTS Cooperant Program. The organizations represented included the Highland Peasant Farmers Committee (CCDA), the New Hope Foundation (NHF) and the Rabinal Legal Clinic. Sadly, the Mesoamerican Institute for Permaculture (IMAP) was not able to attend.

We started the meeting with an update from our partners, including some of their challenges and positive moments during 2018. The assassination of CCDA members was very present in our minds, along with struggles for funding and the advancement of justice for crimes during the Internal Armed Conflict. We also had the opportunity to share some of BTS' work in the Maritimes and Guatemala, as well as gather input for our campaigns. We also had an opportunity to brainstorm around the BTS Cooperant Program, ensuring that the design of the program reflects the needs of our partners.



Finally, as a closing we all reflected on and shared our hopes for 2019:

- Justice for Ixil Women
- More female students
- Families from Laguna Larga and Chaabil Choch can return to their communities
- Unity between men, women and children
- Solidarity between different countries
- Release of political prisoners
- That we have a strong shared campaign: "Land Rights are Human Rights"

COALITIONS

BTS participates in a number of coalitions, including the Americas Policy Group, the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability (CNCA) and the Coalition Against Unjust Mining in Guatemala (CAMIGUA)! Check out what we've been up to together this past year!

Americas Policy Group

BTS participates in the Americas Policy Group (APG), as a member of the Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (ARSN). The APG, a working group of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, brings together approximately 40 international development and humanitarian NGOs, human rights groups, labour unions, research institutions, church and solidarity groups focused on development and social justice issues in the Americas.

BTS Maritimes Coordinator Stacey Gomez serves as co-convenor of the APG-Mesoamerica subgroup. The activities of the APG-Mesoamerica subgroup have included sending a letter in September to Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland expressing concern about the Constitutional crisis and asking that Canada take timely and decisive action in support of CICIG. The APG Mesoamerica group also wrote a letter to Mexican Secretary-designate Sánchez, on the occasion of her visit to Canada, calling for respect of rights of migrants and continues to engage in advocacy for Honduran political prisoners.

From October 1-2, Stacey participated in the APG member meeting in Montreal, Quebec. The meeting brought together representatives from 25 organizations and served as an excellent opportunity to learn about broader issues happening in the region, which impact on our work in Guatemala. The meeting also enabled us share the work that we're doing and to seek opportunities for collaboration.

You can find out more about the APG's work here: <https://ccic.ca/what-we-do/regional-working-groups/americas-policy-group/>



Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability (CNCA)

In January 2018, the Canadian government finally announced that it would be fulfilling a campaign promise with the creation of an Ombudsperson for the extractive sector. We continued to work with the CNCA to ensure the government would follow through with its commitment and that this office would have teeth.

BTS members continued to reach out to their MPs on this issue. BTS also participated in a social media campaign aimed at ensuring follow through on the part of the Liberal government.

On October 12th, 2018, Stacey participated in the CNCA member meeting, sharing BTS' perspective and strategizing with other members on steps forward.

Throughout 2018, the government stalled on the creation of this office and failed to create the office. Finally, in 2019, the Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) was appointed and began their mandate. However, the government's promise of an independent office with investigatory powers has not been fulfilled to date.

Coalition Against Unjust Mining in Guatemala (CAMIGUA)

BTS continues to participate in CAMIGUA, coordinating with international organizations from the US and Canada to pressure North American governments, embassies and mining companies to respect human rights and the defense of territory. This year we focused much of our efforts in support of the resistance to the Escobal mine in Santa Rosa and Jalapa, and support for the La Puya resistance, in opposition to the El Tambor mine owned by US company Kappes, Cassidy and Associates. This included sign-on letters, op-ed pieces in local newspapers, complaints to security commissions for failures to disclose information to shareholders, as well as publishing information from partners on the ground.

Through CAMIGUA, BTS Guatemala Coordinator Lisa Rankin invited to attend the Mesoamerican Movement in Resistance to the Extractivist Model (M4) meeting in Guatemala City in November. M4 is a coalition of organizations from the Americas and beyond working on mining issues. This meeting was particularly focused on the institutionalization of consultations, and how states and companies can manipulate the consultation process.

CAMIGUA also held a 3-day workshop in December on the international arbitration process brought forward by companies against states through free trade agreements. Tahoe Resources has threatened to sue the Guatemalan State for the suspension of the Escobal

Mine, and there is currently a lawsuit presented by Kappes, Cassidy and Associates, which was accepted in December. These cases are between only the State and the company, and are decided by arbitrators in Washington, DC. States can end up paying hundreds of millions of dollars for losses of prospective gains through mining projects. However, communities are ready to express their opposition to this blatant attempt to blackmail the Guatemalan state into restarting the projects.



Photo: CAMIGUA members at M4 meeting

STRENGTHENING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

In February 2018, BTS voted to adopt recommendations from the 2017 Diversity & Inclusion Workshop & Report (<http://bit.ly/311Iqk2>). The recommendations focused on:

- increasing energy and engagement in local committees;
- clarifying BTS's structure and decision-making so people feel on the same page/level playing field;
- developing more genuine solidarity relationships with organizations/ individuals from diverse groups (Racialized, Black and Indigenous People); and
- understanding barriers to participation of marginalized communities in BTS

In order to bring the learning from the December 2017 workshop to the rest of the network, we began to host diversity and inclusion workshops with local committees. We held our first local workshop with the Antigonish committee in March 2018. The workshop was facilitated by BTS Maritimes Coordinator Stacey Gomez and BTS Antigonish Committee member Amy Brierley.



A key focus for the Community Council in 2018 was engaging in groundwork to create an anti-oppression and inclusion working group. The working group met for the first time in October 2018.

At the 2018 Annual Gathering, we held a session on diversity and inclusion, where members were invited to reflect on what these concepts mean to them!

We applaud local committees for the continued work that they do in these areas, building genuine solidarity relationships with diverse communities!

ABOUT US

Breaking the Silence (BTS) is a voluntary network of people in the Maritimes who began to organize in 1988 to support the efforts of Guatemalans struggling for political, social, and economic justice.

We recognize that injustice is connected to structural inequalities both within and between countries, and BTS is committed to supporting structural transformation both in Guatemala and in Canada.

Our work is guided by the understanding that we all deserve to be treated as equals, and that we need to build long-term relationships based on solidarity and mutuality. We respond to the needs and issues defined by our partners and by other Guatemalans with whom we work, and we support them in taking charge of their own lives. Our relationships are built on friendship, sharing, and dialogue as we work, learn, and grow together.

As a community of people who share this commitment to solidarity, we undertake advocacy and lobbying; organize delegations; send interns, volunteers, and human rights accompaniers; promote fairly-traded coffee; and raise awareness within our own communities through speaking tours by Guatemalan leaders and other political campaigns.

WWW.BREAKINGTHESILENCEBLOG.COM

STAY IN TOUCH & UP-TO-DATE

- 1) Visit our blog
- 2) Follow us on social media:
Facebook: @BTSGuateMaritimes
Twitter: @BTS_MG
Instagram: BTSMaritimesGuatemala
- 3) Contact Stacey (BTSMaritimesCoordinator@gmail.com) to be added to the BTS mailing list.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- BTS Annual Gathering, May 31-June 2nd
- BTS Delegation to Guatemala, November 9-21th

THANKS TO EVERYONE!

Thanks to everyone who's supported our work throughout the year, from participating in our various committees, donating and countless other ways!

BTS also extends our thanks for the support of the Tatamagouche Centre, which is an accredited non-profit education, conference, and retreat centre that has been working for transformation of self and society since 1955. For more information, visit tatacentre.ca

