

# Resisting Impunity In Guatemala

The US has had its share of comics in the White House recently. Gee Dub was just simply ridiculous and Obama gets high-grades as a stand-up, bringing to mind Bob Hope at top form. Now we have an insult comic who gets big laughs mocking victims and the disabled. These were amateurs but in Guatemala the President Jimmy Morales' actual day job was comedy. Child of a circus family, he gained fame as a TV comedian, starring in the series *Moralejas* ("Morals") alongside his brother Sammy.

He formally changed his name from *James Ernesto Morales Cabrera* to *Jimmy Morales* in 2011 when he ran third in a race for mayor of Mixco. Two years later he became Secretary General of the **National Convergence Front** and in 2015 got himself elected President in a run-off against the previous First Lady. He campaigned against abortion, legalizing drugs and pro-death penalty. He got 67% of the vote.

Since then he has been sliding in popularity. A former cabinet minister accused him of having sexually abused young female public workers with complicity of other government officials. He had his own New Orleans and Puerto Rico style failures, in this case *Volcan de Fuego*. He just couldn't find the funds. He was right behind Trump in moving the Guatemalan Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. His pro-Trump policies fueled his unpopularity because he has made no effort to support Guatemalans caught in the US Immigration tentacles.

Morales is also an Evangelical Christian. In Guatemala such Christians, like Jimmy himself, deny that the attempted genocide of over 200,000 Mayan people took place from 1966 til 1996 when the genocidal campaign ended. This is not unusual connection in Guatemala where Evangelical Christians supported the extermination campaign, including crucial support from guess where – Eureka where Jim Durkin and the his Lighthouse Jesus Freak movement.

Guatemala had made an attempt to put its genocidal past behind it by signing an agreement with the UN on December 12, 2006, creating an **International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)**. Impunity is how the UN defines having political **Immunity** from consequences. On August 1, 2007, the Congress of the Republic approved the mandate of the Commission to investigate the existence of illegal security forces and clandestine security apparatuses (Ciacs) that commit crimes that affect the human rights of Guatemalan citizens, as well as identify the structures of these illegal groups.

The Commission – which played a key role in the resignation and arrest of Morales' predecessor for corruption-- has been investigating reports of illegal campaign financing against Morales. Morales brother and his son had already been charged with corruption. Morales was initially supportive of the body, vowing to renew its two-year mandate so that it could continue throughout his presidency and beyond. The relationship quickly began to sour, however, as Morales, his relatives and his political party all became subjects of investigations into corruption, including illegal campaign financing. This was too much internal meddling according to Morales and on August 31 of this year he attempted to rid himself once and for all of Iván Velásquez, Commissioner of the CICIG, by refusing to reverse his expulsion. The CICIG had begun "investigating claims that his party took illegal donations, including from drug-traffickers" and asked "congress to strip him of immunity from prosecution." This was a broad coalition of social movements, Indigenous Ancestral Authorities, student groups, members of the LGBTQ community, and campesino organizations have mobilized to reject Morales' decision to end the CICIG and show their support for the body. Since Morales' announcement the coalition has carried out nearly weekly protests, including blocking highways and protesting in the central plaza and outside the country's congressional building. Mobilizations began on September 10 with the Indigenous Municipality of Sololá organizing roadblocks along the Interamerican Highway, which passes through the department, in support of Velásquez and the CICIG. For six hours, tens of thousands of residents of the 83 villages and towns that make up the municipality blocked traffic along the highway.

The following day, on September 11, student groups from the University of San Carlos (USAC), members of campesino organizations, and anti-corruption efforts mobilized outside of the Guatemalan congress to reject Morales' decision and to protest a series of reforms that would undo anti-corruption efforts in the country. The situation grew

tense as police pushed back protesters to permit a congressional member to leave the building, and **protesters responded by throwing bananas, water, and flowers at him**. That same day the Indigenous Ancestral Government of the 48 Cantones of Tonicapán, the autonomous government of the communities within the municipality of Tonicapán, blocked the Interamerican Highway in protest of Morales.

On September 12, members of the Campesino Development Committee, (**CODECA**) organized a march that converged in the central plaza. Thousands from diverse organizations, including CODECA and other campesino organizations, & LGBT activists took part.

Morales, who promised voters in 2015 that he was "not corrupt nor a thief" (*ni corrupto ni ladrón*), has faced investigations into the illegal financing of his 2015 campaign, as well as allegations of sexual assault within the administration. Morales was elected after the political crisis and subsequent protests following the CICIG's investigations into the administration of Otto Pérez Molina, which eventually led to the resignation of Pérez Molina, his Vice President Roxana Baldetti, and the majority of his cabinet. Pérez Molina and Baldetti currently face prosecution for corruption.

As organizations gathered in the Central Plaza, the Guatemalan government sent in hundreds of police officers and deployed military special forces, known as Kaibiles, to Guatemala City to block the streets around Congress. The deployment of soldiers violates the 1996 peace accords, which sought to demilitarize the country by limiting the military's presence to the country's borders. An army spokesperson claimed that the Kaibiles' presence was necessary because Morales was in the congressional building and needed protection. But their appearance generated fear and anger in the streets.

"President Morales has made the situation in Guatemala complicated and tense," said Miguel de León Ceto, the Indigenous mayor and member of the Ixil Maya Ancestral Authorities of Nebaj, Quiché, on September 12 in Guatemala City. "We reject these actions. They are not governing the country, but rather protecting themselves and guaranteeing that impunity and corruption continue." The Ixil Mayans had borne the brunt of the previous military-led genocide.

September 14 a group of over 100 current students and alumni from the University of San Carlos marched alongside various marching bands in the flag raising ceremony in commemoration of the 197<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Guatemala's independence from Spain. As Morales presided over the commemoration of the country's independence, members of group USAC is the People drowned out the message with shouts against Morales and corruption.

On September 16, Guatemala's Constitutional Congress ruled against the administration and issued a decision to permit Velásquez's re-entry into the country. The Morales administration has rejected the court's decision, but the Guatemalan military announced that it would comply with the decision after the court rejected the Ministry of Defense's appeal of the decision. On September 20, thousands of students from Guatemala's universities called for a day of nationwide action and marched through Guatemala City. Similar demonstrations were held in Quetzaltenango and along rural highways such as the highway that passes through the Ixil region of Quiché.

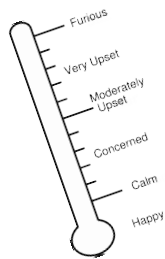
Faced with the continuation of the crisis and Morales' unwillingness to comply with the highest courts orders, organizers are planning to continue actions into October with at least one major march planned.

**Thanks to Jeff Abbot & Sandra Cuffe**

## GLOBAL WARMING'S PAPER TRAIL

In the 1980s, oil companies like Exxon and Shell carried out internal assessments of the carbon dioxide released by fossil fuels, and forecast the planetary consequences of these emissions. In 1982, for example, Exxon predicted that by about 2060, CO<sub>2</sub> levels would double relative to the 1800s, and that this, according to the best science at the time, would push the planet's average temperatures up by about 3°C.

Later that decade, in 1988, an internal report by Shell projected similar effects, but also found that CO<sub>2</sub> could double even earlier, by 2030. Privately, these companies did not dispute the links between their products, global warming, and ecological calamity. On the contrary, their research confirmed the connections. Shell's assessment foresaw a 60-70 cm rise in sea level, and noted that warming could also fuel the disintegration of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, resulting in a worldwide rise in sea level of "five to six meters." That would be enough to inundate entire low-lying countries.



Shell's analysts also warned of the "disappearance of specific ecosystems or habitat destruction," predicted an increase in "runoff, destructive floods, and inundation of low-lying farmland," and said that "new sources of freshwater would be required" to compensate for changes in precipitation. Global changes in air temperature would also "drastically change the way people live and work." All told, Shell concluded, "the changes may be the greatest in recorded history."

For its part, Exxon warned of "**potentially catastrophic events that must be considered.**" Like Shell's experts, Exxon's scientists predicted devastating sea-level rise, and warned that the American Midwest and other parts of the world could become desert-like. Looking on the bright side, the company expressed its confidence that "**this problem is not as significant to mankind as a nuclear holocaust or world famine.**"

The documents make for frightening reading. And the effect is all the more chilling in view of the oil giants' refusal to warn the public about the damage that their own researchers predicted. Shell's report, marked "confidential," was first disclosed by a Dutch news organization earlier this year. Exxon's study was not intended for external distribution, either; it was leaked in 2015.

Nor did these companies ever take responsibility for their products. In Shell's study, the firm argued that the "main burden" of addressing climate change rests not with the energy industry, but with governments and consumers. That argument might have made sense if oil executives, including those from Exxon and Shell, had

not later lied about climate change and actively prevented governments from enacting clean-energy policies.

Although the details of global warming were foreign to most people in the 1980s, among the few who had a better idea than most were the companies contributing the most to it. Despite scientific uncertainties, the bottom line was this: oil firms recognized that their products added CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere, understood that this would lead to warming, and calculated the likely consequences. And then they chose to accept those risks on our behalf, at our expense, and without our knowledge.

The oil industry's secret climate-change predictions are becoming reality, and not by accident. Fossil-fuel producers willfully drove us toward the grim future they feared by promoting their products, lying about the effects, and aggressively defending their share of the energy market.

As the world warms, the building blocks of our planet – its ice sheets, forests, and atmospheric and ocean currents – are being altered beyond repair. Who has the right to foresee such damage and then choose to fulfill the prophecy?

**Fossil-fuel companies had the arrogance to decide what level of devastation was appropriate for humanity, and had the temerity to follow through.**

**Thanks to Benjamin Franta  
project-syndicate.org**