

Take Action Now

# Global Response Campaign Alert Guatemala



Barillas community members climb on to a Hydro Santa Cruz construction vehicle looking onto the ceremony dedicating a cross to Miguel, a Barillas resident who was shot and killed by Hydro Santa Cruz employees on May 1, 2012.

Photos by Danielle DeLuca

*“The right to be consulted is a universal human right that no one can deny us, much less criminalize. The right to self-determination is a right that corresponds to us as original peoples of Mesoamérica.”*

—The Assembly of Peoples of Huehuetenango for the Defense of the Territory.

## Guatemala

### We Are All Barillas – Stop a Dam on Our Sacred River!

On May 12, 2012, a community leader in Guatemala was killed by security guards of a Spanish hydroelectric company. Riots broke out. In response, President Molina declared martial law and army tanks descended into Santa Cruz Barillas, Huehuetenango. Heavily armed military lined the streets of the Q’anjob’al Maya town, seeking and detaining community leaders who were outspoken against the dam.

Since 2009, Hidralia Energia, through its subsidiary Hydro Santa Cruz, has been planning a series of dams on the Q’am B’alam River that surrounds the town of Santa Cruz Barillas. The river and its three waterfalls are considered sacred by the Q’anjob’al community, whose ancestors named the river “Yellow Tiger” after the animal that was said to drink from its waters.

The proposed project would be installed in an area used by the community for ceremonial, recreational, and agricultural purposes. The project will also have significant impacts on the already fragile natural environment. A study by the International Commission on Tropical Biology and Natural Resources found the area of Barillas to be of the highest priority for conservation efforts within Guatemala. Barillas is home to many amphibian and insect species found nowhere else in the world.

In the last five years, the community has twice held referenda and voted unequivocally to reject the exploitation of its natural resources by transnational companies. Nevertheless, the government approved the Cambalam I dam, flagrantly ignoring the people’s right to free, prior, and informed consent as guaranteed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), to which Guatemala is a signatory.

At the outset of martial law, grassroots activists successfully mobilized to launch the campaign, *Todos y Todas Somos Barillas* (“We Are All Barillas”). Using social media and community radio, Molina’s administration was successfully pressured to end martial law, thereby challenging the government’s position that community leaders were drug traffickers and criminals rather than activists standing up for their rights.

Now, we need your help to ensure that Hydro Santa Cruz backs down from its plans to dam the sacred Q’am B’alam River.

**Guatemala’s president is defending foreign business before the rights of the Guatemalan people.**

Q'anjob'al women lead the audience in prayer for the release of the nine men in custody of the state and the dozens of other leaders who have fled their homes in fear of persecution. Sign reads, "Hydro Santa Cruz generates violence. For the unity and peace of Barillas, No more impunity. We demand the withdrawal of Hydro Santa Cruz."



## Demanding Inherent Rights

When Hidralia Energia began to develop the dam project in 2009, the Q'anjob'al Maya community of Santa Cruz Barillas protested not only because they hadn't been consulted, as is their right, but also out of concerns that the dam would affect the volume and flow of the river. The company has failed to inform locals of the dam's potential effects, claiming on its website that it will have zero environmental impact. Any environmental impact studies (if even conducted) were never made public, nor social impacts assessed, despite these being key to validating a project on Indigenous Peoples' land. The Guatemalan government has even approved the Cambalam I dam project to apply for UN-certified carbon credits with the Clean Development Mechanism.

Though the project is considered small by industry standards, the community fears that it will be a gateway to larger, more destructive projects in the future, such as gold mining. This fear is not unfounded. Gold and silver veins run through much of northwest Guatemala, and the transnational industry has had toxic repercussions for the environment and Indigenous Peoples across the country. Only six months into office, the Molina administration has approved 68 new mining licenses. Another 734 are pending, along with another 47 hydroelectric licenses existing or in process. Virtually none of these licenses have been granted based on the free, prior, and informed consent of the Indigenous people who have traditionally occupied these lands.

Hidralia Energia has a dubious history in Spain, where the company's owners were charged with bribery and corruption surrounding the authorization of licenses for 16 dams. After three years of investigation, they began to dispose of their Spanish assets while initiating operations in Guatemala. Hidralia's lack of transparency and combative business approach has fueled the community's outrage: "Since the company arrived, they have been invoking fear in the community, intimidating us, and motivating us to sell our land," said local leader Josepha Andres. The threats culminated on the night of May 1, when the company's security guards shot three men, killing one and seriously wounding Pablo Antonio Pablo, who had been threatened by the company after refusing to sell his land.

To date, nine community leaders who were outspoken against the dam remain detained in Guatemala City's central prison, more than 16 hours' travel from their families (who cannot afford to visit them). Many more have fled the country to escape persecution. By declaring martial law in Barillas so soon after taking office, President Molina sent a message to the dozens of other communities in Guatemala organizing against foreign exploitation: The government's new "iron-fist" policy is about protecting profit, not people.

In partnership with community radio station *Radio Snuq Jolom Konob*, the Western People's Council, and other grassroots organizations, Cultural Survival is joining the fight to hold Hidralia Energia and the Guatemalan government accountable to their obligation to respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights. Let's make sure that what happens in Barillas sets an example of respect for Indigenous Peoples' self-determination and their right to say no to foreign exploitation.

## Make Your Voice Heard!

Barillas community members are asking world citizens to send letters to Hidralia Energia and the Guatemalan Ministry of the Environment.

In your letters, please:

- **Urge** Guatemalan officials to respect Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination. Remind them that since Guatemala has ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the state is required to consult with Indigenous Peoples when making decisions that may affect them. Issuing licenses for projects that affect Indigenous Peoples while no consultation has taken place is a violation of their rights.
- **Express** deep concern that the proposed Cambalam I dam will greatly affect the Q'anjob'al Mayan people's traditional and ceremonial uses of the O'am B'alam River and its three waterfalls, and could put endemic amphibian species at risk.
- **Demand** the release of nine community leaders that were detained illegally and continue to be incarcerated, and an end to the continued persecution of community leaders peacefully organizing to protect their land.

### Please send letters, emails, and faxes to:

Hidralia Energia  
Avenida del Ejercito n.10  
15006 A Coruña, Spain  
Phone: (Guatemala) + 502 23 78 13 28  
(Spain) +34 981 17 40 17  
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Phone: (502) 24 23 0500 or (502) 24 23 0436, Ext.2311  
(502) 24 23 0500, Ext 1204

### Tips:

- Postage from the U.S. to Spain and Guatemala is \$1.05
- Visit our website to download and print these pages to hand out at events
- Spread the news on Facebook and Twitter

### More information:

More information and a model letter is available at [www.cs.org](http://www.cs.org)

### Please Take Action!

The Q'anjob'al people of Barillas say  
*Yuj wal dios* ("Thank you")!