

GUATEMALA



The Land is Our Life Statement by a Returnee

My name is Pedro Coq Chen. I was in the Mayatecún camp in the state of Campeche. I lived there for nine years. We lived in Chiapas near the Echeverría border for a year and a half before that. From there we went to Campeche in 1984. Now we are coming back from Campeche.

We hope that our return goes well. We have decided to get to know our land again, because the land is our life, the life of all campesinos. A campesino cannot live without land. That is why we refugees and our leaders have been making plans since 1985 to return to plots of land which we left behind.

Now we want to go back there and get to know our country again. We separated ourselves from our country, but not because we wanted to. The government has said we went to Mexico because we are arrogant or because we do not want to work. This is not true. We suffered.

We suffered exploitation, violence, massacres. Those who were suffering left. We left to seek refuge. Many of those who could not leave died - men, women, children and old people. They were far away in other departments such as Cobán and Alta Verapaz.

People do not know what the army has been doing. Children were murdered. We suffered a lot. In México we met up with brothers and sisters who had also suffered; who had been treated badly by the army. We had to leave to escape the massacres.

In Mexico we realized that we are the same people even if we are from different ethnic groups. I hope that which happened to

us does not happen again. For us it started in 1980. That is when we started leaving.

Those who were able to leave are going back now. When we came to Mexico we brought young children. When I came I brought two children, one girl and one boy. Now they are big. I hope it does not happen to us again. We suffered a lot. There was much sorrow.

Despite the fact that the government is allowing us to return, I have very strong feelings. It is not our fault that we work in the country side. We live in the Reina area so they thought we were involved in certain problems, certain organizations. But we were working peacefully in our cooperatives.

I would go to the capital, Guatemala City, to settle accounts with the Colonel, the coordinator of INACOP (National Agricultural Institute for Cooperatives). I would go see him once a month. But I always had difficulty to get back to my land.

The problems began in 1981. By 1982 it had become very bad and we had to leave. The government pursued us night and day in the jungle. They pressured us a lot. They let us suffer hunger and fatigue.

Those of us who were able to leave were only able to save our bodies. Our bodies and our children were the only things we saved. The belongings we had were lost. We lost them because we were no longer able to carry them day and night. We suffered a lot on the days when it rained. This is what I experienced and there is nothing else I can say.

Source: Peace Brigades International

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