

## Romero Fund: Guatemala

### Urgent need: Defending the rights of the Mayan people

#### A long history of violence

Trócaire began working in Guatemala in the 1980s during the worst moments of the country's civil war. We supported thousands of Guatemalan refugees who had fled the violence and were living in camps throughout Mexico and Honduras at this time. Trócaire partners were heavily involved in bringing the former dictator General Jose Efraim Rios Montt to trial in 2013 on charges of genocide, specifically targeting Mayan indigenous populations.

#### Mayan people are being forcibly evicted from their land

Today the indigenous people of Guatemala continue in their struggle to obtain justice for the appalling human rights abuses and genocide of the 1980s. Discrimination against the Mayan people is rife and thousands are now being forcibly evicted from their ancestral land and homes. The land is being obtained by government and commercial interests, particularly for large scale production of sugarcane and palm oil for bio-fuels.



In 2011, **769 Mayan Q'eqchi families**, who were in the process of obtaining legal rights to the land they were occupying, were forcefully evicted from 14 communities across the Polochic Valley, in order to consolidate land for the production of sugar cane. They lost their lands, their homes, their animals and their belongings. They were left living at the side of the road or on rented or borrowed land, waiting for a response from the government.

Photo: Aidan Gillen visited Guatemala with Trocaire in 2014 to raise awareness of the plight of the Mayan people. 54% of children from these evicted communities are suffering from chronic malnutrition.



*"They beat us, they used tear gas on us... They burned everything we couldn't take out of the houses. We were left without clothes, without anything. They cut down the corn. We lost so much."*

*Community member, Agua Caliente, Guatemala, August 2014*

**What is the Romero Fund?** The Romero Fund aims to raise €2.1 million over three years to tackle urgent human rights abuses and humanitarian needs in DRC, Pakistan, Guatemala and Gaza.



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Photo above: Maria Soto and other Mayan women celebrate after former Guatemalan dictator Rios Montt was found guilty of genocide against the indigenous Ixil people in the 1980s. Trócaire's partners had fought for almost 30 years for justice for these communities. (Photo: Elena Hermosa)

### What we can do

Trócaire has been working with Mayan communities in Guatemala for many years providing humanitarian support and legal aid through our local partners. We also directly help individual human rights defenders and communities who are bringing cases to court. Human rights defenders put themselves at serious risk by standing up for their communities.



"The Mayan women of the Polochic Valley are not simply victims: they play a crucial role in community resistance to these projects. They have formed women's councils, they participate in marches, blockades and land occupations. They have been in the front lines when facing security forces and, in some cases, they have participated in negotiations with the State or the companies involved."

**Tom Crowley, Head of Region for Trócaire in Central America**

Photo: Juana Laj Ical has been able to rent a small house with the money she makes from the sale of hand-woven bags. She and her family are still waiting to be resettled on new land after being evicted from Polochic Valley.

With your help we reach even more people in Guatemala through:

- **Legal aid:** Supporting local people to secure land title and challenge evictions. Helping survivors of human rights violations to understand their rights and bring cases to court.
- **Human Rights Defenders:** Providing security training and one to one support.
- **Recognition of human rights abuses:** Raising awareness of what's happening in Guatemala on an international stage.

€10,000 will provide counselling and individual support to 228 survivors of human rights abuses in Guatemala

#### Guatemala Facts

**Population:** 15.9 million  
**Human Development rank:** 128 out of 187 countries

	Ireland	Guatemala
<b>Life Expectancy</b>	80.9 years	71.8 years
<b>Average Years of Schooling</b>	11.6 years	5.6 years

(Source: UNDP Human Development Index)

**Trócaire in Guatemala since:** mid 1980s

**Impact:** Trócaire's work in Guatemala has directly helped 23,112 people in the last year.

Last year we helped **1,000 families** in Guatemala and Nicaragua to secure access to land.

**No. of partner organisations:** 30