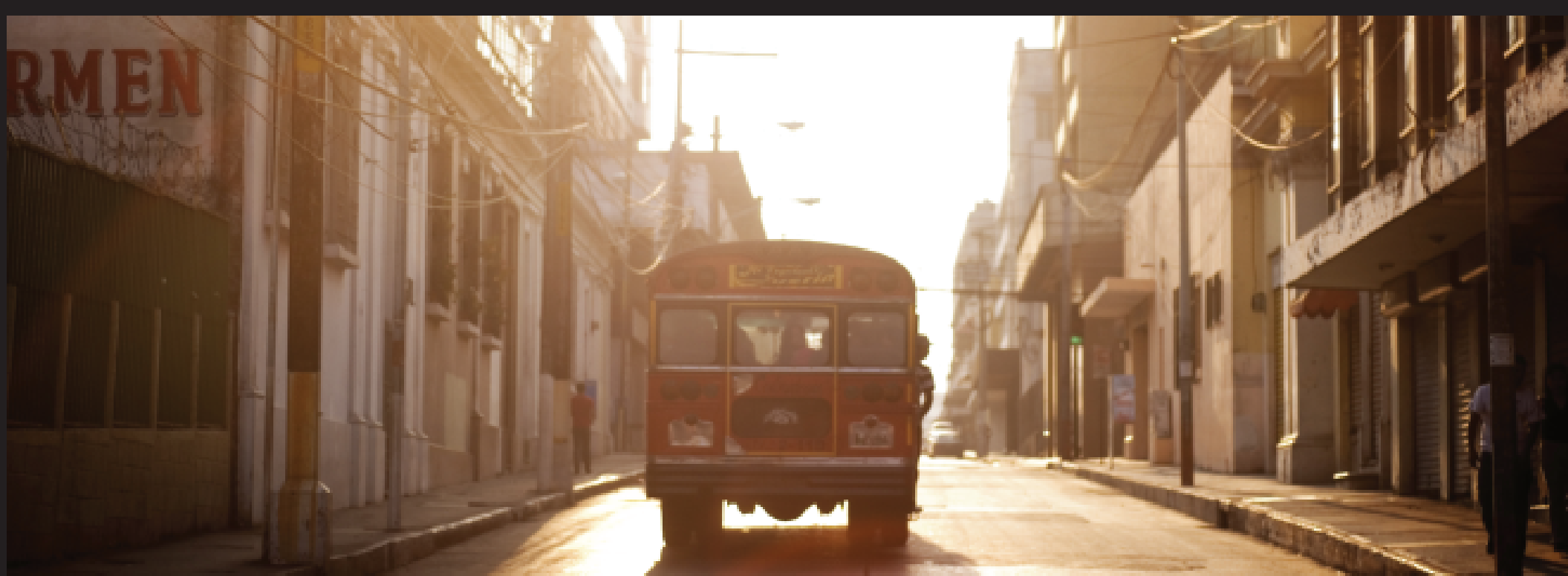


# Nuestra Lucha:

The struggle for Campesino farmers' rights in Guatemala



A transit bus heads up the street in Guatemala city. In March 2009 alone, 8 public bus drivers were assassinated, some in the middle of the day.

"We are not myths of the past, ruins in the jungle, or zoos. We are people and we want to be respected, not to be victims of intolerance and racism."

- Rigoberta Menchú, Guatemalan Indigenous Rights Activist, Nobel Peace Prize 1992

The history of Guatemala is that of exploitation, corruption, civil war, injustice, struggle, triumph and tragedy.

In 1954, a US-supported military coup led to a thirty-six year civil war (1960-1996). The civil war destroyed the countryside and caused the genocide of the indigenous Mayan peoples.

Though a Peace Accord was signed in 1996, violence and corruption continues to plague the country. Impunity threatens the rule of law, including failure to prosecute high officials for massacres and other human rights crimes committed during the civil war.

There have been over 2,500 brutal killings since 2001, and a failure to investigate and prosecute these and other violent crimes, particularly against women. There also continues to be thousands of cases of assaults, death threats, and killings of human rights activists, witnesses, anthropologists, journalists, trade unionists, and others involved in the investigations of human rights crimes.



The children of Santa Cruz Quixaja, where the CCDA coffee movement has a headquarters.

The CCDA, or the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (Comité Campesino del Altiplano), is an organization that fights for the rights of Mayan farmers in Guatemala. The CCDA's mission is to improve the standard of living through programs that enhance equality and participation in social, economic, cultural and political processes in the country.

At the national level, the CCDA works collaboratively with other *campesino* organizations in declaring their discontent with the lack of governmental policies in favour of rural development and calls for a better Guatemala that meets the needs of *campesinos* and indigenous people.



Leocadio Juracán holds green coffee beans near his home in Cruz Quixaja.

The CCDA is no exception when it comes to unwanted and unwarranted attention. Human rights defender and Board Member of the CCDA, Leocadio Juracán, has received death threats, and fellow members of the CCDA have repeatedly been targeted because of their human rights activities.

In February 2010, 182 bags of green coffee (150 pounds each) were stolen from the CCDA's processing centre in Cerro de Oro, Santiago Atitlán. The theft is believed to be in retaliation for the publication of a recent human rights report by the CCDA. This incident is just one in a series of threats and acts of intimidation against the CCDA, timed with the involvement of the group in defending *campesino* rights.

In Guatemala, 2% of the people own over 90% of the country's arable land, which leaves very little, low quality land for thousands of individual farmers. Many are forced to work miles away from their families on the big coffee plantations and to depend on wealthy landowners and corporations for their homes and livelihood.

In 2002, the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (BTS) and Just Us! began a joint venture to support the CCDA coffee farmers, with CCDA coffee roasted and sold under the name *Breaking the Silence*. Just Us! initially paid Fair Trade prices to the CCDA even though the farmers were not yet certified. Now, all the CCDA coffee is certified Fair Trade and organic.



For more information, please visit [www.justuscoffee.com](http://www.justuscoffee.com) and [Martimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network \(www.breaking-the-silence.ca\)](http://www.breaking-the-silence.ca).

Photos & Text: Shayna George (April 2009)

Sources: [ccda.galeon.com](http://ccda.galeon.com)

