

## The recipients of the 2020 Topacio Award are...



Each year the Topacio Reynoso Pacheco Award recognizes and supports youth fighting to protect the environment and their territories through the use of art and other creative forms of resistance. This year, we received applications from 8 departments across Guatemala reflecting the struggles youth face as a result of extractivist industries, megaprojects, the criminalization of land defenders, government corruption, and various forms of structural violence and attacks on people, and Indigenous ancestral cultures. It is evident from all the applications we received that youth are taking action and that as a result, there is hope that Guatemala will flourish.

This award is dedicated in the memory of Topacio Reynoso Pacheco, who lost her life at 16 years of age as the result of her vocal opposition against the Canadian mining project Escobal in her community of Mataquescuintla, Jalapa. We know that she would be joyous and take pride in all of the efforts youth like her continue to make in defense of their communities. Topacio's strength and legacy is embodied in these powerful and inspiring forms of resistance.

In this spirit, we are proud to present this year's award to a group that has been organizing for the past eight years and has been using theatre of the oppressed and rap to confront the Tres Rios hydroelectric dam project in their territory, as well as the ensuing criminalization of land defenders in their community. Through the accompaniment and interviews of political prisoners, the collective performed an original play to advocate for the release of criminalized land and water defenders. They work to build youth capacity to defend their territory and serve as community leaders by facilitating workshops with youth and Indigenous authorities. These workshops employ art to develop leadership skills and build strong networks of youth inspired to create change.

**The recipients of the 2020 Topacio Reynoso Pacheco award are Colectivo Juventud Empoderada Organizada (Empowered and Organized Youth Collective) in San Pablo, San Marcos!**

Our selection committee would also like to recognize another group focused on the defense of water and their territory against the mega collector project, which threatens to channel water from Lake Atitlan to the sugarcane plantations along Guatemala's pacific coast. This year's honorable mention goes out to **Movimiento de Jóvenes Mayas AJPU**.

We acknowledge that all of the struggles youth are facing and engaged in addressing are important and encourage youth everywhere to keep motivated in protecting the environment and their territories by organizing and continuing to build strong solidarity networks. We thank all of the groups who applied this year and encourage you to continue your work and make sure to apply for next year's award.

*The Topacio Reynoso Pacheco Award is made possible with the support of Bows and Arrows Coffee, MiningWatch Canada, the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network, the United Steelworkers, and the Justice, Mission and Outreach Committee of the eastern Regions of the United Church of Canada.*

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Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network



<https://www.breakingthesilenceblog.com>