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## Guatemala's New Program To Pacify Indians Looks Like Old One

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

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[The following article was distributed by the Pacific News Service on 01/16-22/89. The LADB has authorization from PNS for reproduction.] By Susan Leffler For Guatemala's Indians living in the highlands north of the capital where the army waged a brutal counterinsurgency campaign in the early 1980s the face of peace under civilian rule still looks like war. The military still dictates every aspect of their lives. Up to 20,000 Indians living in the Ixil Triangle are slated to be resettled into 20 new "relocation villages" close to military outposts. Unlike earlier resettlement programs, the Ixil Project, run jointly by the government and military high command, is no longer justified as a weapon of counterinsurgency. It is considered a means of incorporating the Indians into a modern, democratic state. "We want to create alternatives for people," explains Project director Oswaldo Juarez in an interview at the National Palace in Guatemala City. "We want to give them training and education so they can think of things beyond the four walls of an adobe house. There is much talk about preserving the Indians' tradition and culture...To us, maintaining a traditional way of life here is maintaining underdevelopment." Jose Chuj, 45, is one of some 3,800 Indians who have already been resettled under the new program over the last year. For years Chuj planted and harvested corn, coveting the ears as the main ingredient of his diet and the centerpiece of his Mayan religion. Now he sits on a tree stump and gestures toward several neat rows of powder pink plasterboard houses with shiny tin roofs. This is his new home, the relocation village of Janlai. "We're screwed," he mutters, shaking his head. "Before we lived with our houses farther apart. We each had enough land to raise crops and feed our families. Now there's no room to grow anything at all. It's nice to have the new houses with cement floors and street lights outside, but we have no food." Authorities directed the 45-year-old Chuj, his wife and five children to Janlai after soldiers drove the family from territory still under the control of leftist guerrillas who have been battling authorities in the region for 27 years. The army is sweeping the dense mountains in an effort to wipe out what remains of the rebels' civilian support base. Maria Palop and her five sons caught up in a similar sweep in September 1987 now live in the relocation village of Quechip, about five miles down the road from Janlai. "We women were bathing and washing our clothes in the river when we heard a helicopter," Mrs. Palop recalls of the day her family's latest odyssey began. "It had a loudspeaker, and the pilot told us to get in. They were going to take us to a meeting. We all left with just the clothes on our backs, but instead of going to a meeting we were taken to the military base at Playa Grande and kept there for a month and a half." From there Mrs. Palop and the others were taken to Xematatze, a government reception center just outside the army base at Nebaj. Like other Indians brought there by soldiers or fleeing what they describe as army bombardments or skirmishes with guerrillas, the Palops arrived exhausted and traumatized. For three months they received emergency medical treatment, food, and clothing, and attended political reeducation classes at the army base in Nebaj. Then they were sent to Quechip, where they are trying to rebuild their lives according to the official blueprint. Mrs. Palop says nothing about her new life. But a neighbor, who asks that his name not be used, says he and the other Ixils are unhappy and are petitioning authorities to change the housing plan. He says "no one can survive" living so close together. Residents are also upset that

they have to get written permission to leave Quechup for more than a day. Project officials downplay the discontent. Carlos Cortez of the Government Refugee Commission in Guatemala City says it's too soon for the Indians to appreciate their new lifestyles. "They're not used to living in an urbanized environment, so they don't like it," he says. "But they don't understand that eventually we're going to provide schools for their children and health care. They can't evaluate this yet," he says. The Ixil Project's long-range plans, Cortez says, include providing residents with new jobs. To prepare them, the Refugee Commission offers training classes at Xemamatze in skills like haircutting and bread baking. When reminded that the Ixils do not eat bread but rather tortillas, Cortez replied, "they would if they had it." Local observers are skeptical of the project's economic goals. A nearly identical resettlement project begun by the military in the Triangle in 1983 failed to raise the Indians' standard of living. Five years ago, the army moved roughly 70,000 Indians from their homes in the war zone to more than two dozen "model villages." But the plan to create new jobs for residents never got off the ground and the unemployment rate in these projects is still nearly 100%. A social worker in the model villages says most people still can't pay for the electricity in their houses, and many of the health centers are unstaffed because of a lack of doctors. Another government worker says 15 families had recently "snuck out" of one model village because they were unhappy over living conditions. Meanwhile, an army officer in Nebaj, displaying a map of the entire northern part of the country, explains that the military plans to resettle the whole area. The current Ixil Project calls for the program to expand northeast into the Ixcan jungle region once the 20 relocation villages planned for the Ixil Triangle are completed.

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