



**For immediate release:
500 YEARS to premiere at Sundance Film Festival**

The world premiere of third installation in Guatemalan resistance trilogy, 500 YEARS, set to release on Sundance stage this coming January.

[500 YEARS](#), the much anticipated third film from Director Pamela Yates, continues the epic saga of indigenous resistance in Guatemala that began with [When the Mountains Tremble](#) (1983), followed by [Granito: How to Nail a Dictator](#) (2011). All three films will have premiered at the Sundance Film Festival over a 33-year period.

From a historic genocide trial to the ousting of a president, *500 YEARS* tells a sweeping story of mounting resistance played out in Guatemala's recent history, through the actions and perspectives of the majority indigenous Mayan population, who now stand poised to re-imagine their society.

In *500 YEARS*, the Mayans lead Guatemala to a historical tipping point, from the genocide trial of former dictator General Rios Montt to the citizen's uprising that toppled President Otto Pérez Molina. While indigenous peoples of Guatemala are no strangers to oppression, with the recent events that took place over a tumultuous three-year span, change finally seems possible when their movement is met with the general public's will to end corruption.

500 YEARS also introduces the music of up-and-coming Mayan singer/songwriter Sara Curruchich, who sings *Ralk'wa'l ulew* (*Children of the Land* in Mayan language Kaqchikel) at the close of the film.

As witness to this heroic moment in Guatemalan history, *500 YEARS* documents the beginning of the end of a culture of impunity and a society ready for change. Focusing on universal themes of justice, racism, power and corruption, *500 YEARS* resonates throughout the Americas—from Canada to Tierra del Fuego.

THE STORY

Early morning in Guatemala City, January 2013, soldiers with automatic weapons stand on street corners. A long line of indigenous Mayans head into the high court, an institution historically dominated by the interests of a small white elite minority. Journalist/Anthropologist and *500 YEARS*' lead protagonist, Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj says, "this is a country rising from the ashes of genocide, and that still lives in fear." Just three decades earlier, the ruling elite, supported by the U.S., engineered a coup, toppling a democratically elected government, unleashing a dark period of repression and massacres leaving 200,000 mostly indigenous people dead, and 45,000 urban artists, intellectuals, and activists



disappeared. It took thirteen years of perseverance, but finally the Mayan survivors brought one of the chief architects of the genocide, former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, to trial.

While the outcome of the trial restores a momentary glimpse of hope for justice for Guatemala when Ríos Montt is found guilty, ten days later, under ferocious pressure from the political and business elite the Constitutional Court annuls the verdict on a technicality.

However disappointing the trial was for many, others still saw it as a small and historically unlikely victory for the indigenous population. Mayan activist, Andrea Ixchiú, sees the trial as a call for Mayan unity, in the face of a new threats—the “genocide of the land” and community at the hands of ruthless international extractive industries aided and abetted by the Guatemalan state.

Andrea is right. The genocide did more than murder massive numbers of people, the army stole vast tracts of land and erased 626 indigenous communities from the face of the earth. Today, in the exact areas where massacres were perpetrated, communities have been replaced with international mega-projects like open pit mines, massive hydroelectric dams, and sprawling agri-businesses, which continue to destroy Mayan lands. According to Irma Alicia, “If the government grants all the licenses that companies have requested, there will be a mine every 60 square miles in Guatemala. It will destroy the country.” President Otto Pérez Molina was the chief cheerleader for all these international extractive industries.

But Irma Alicia has thought deeply about the situation, and explains that no amount of Mayan unity on its own can touch the elite rulers of Guatemala. The only hope would be to forge an indigenous alliance with the non-indigenous urban population, something unlikely in a country driven by structural racism.

In the spring of 2015, something unexpected happens: irrevocable evidence of a massive corruption scheme in President Otto Pérez Molina’s government is exposed. His Vice-President is heavily implicated too. As Irma Alicia asserts in her newspaper column, corruption in Guatemala has become endemic, from local officials to the top politicians, and it is robbing the people of desperately needed services. After suffering decades of governmental abuse, the urban dwellers begin to stir with a growing sense of outrage. At first a few people sat in at the capital. Then, week by week, more of the urban middle class comes out to protest, joining up with thousands of Mayans pouring in from the countryside, uniting in resistance and overcoming the racial divide. Daniel Pascual, the leader of Guatemala’s largest indigenous peasant movement, is busy helping organize demonstrations across the countryside, while Andrea has founded a media collective of young people to produce a biting web-based news show that goes viral. Irma Alicia is there too, participating in the demonstrations, rain or shine, and describing it in her column. Then, the largest demonstration in the history of Guatemala rocks the capital and finally topples President Otto Pérez Molina, sending him off to Matamoros Prison like a common criminal. But like all real stories there are no Hollywood endings. Irma Alicia reminds us that



this is just the beginning of a long road, but she and the other Mayan protagonists rejoice knowing this is a different and more hopeful Guatemala than the one they were born into, with the power equation forever changed.

CREDITS

Director	Pamela Yates
Producer	Paco de Onís
Editor	Peter Kinoy
Cinematographers	Melle van Essen Rene Soza
Co-Producers	Beatriz Gallardo Shaul Raul Estuardo Socon Canel
Composer	Roger C. Miller
Featuring (in order of appearance)	Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj Matilde Terraza Gallego Daniel Pascual Hernández Andrea Ixchíu Hernández Julio Solórzano Foppa

500 YEARS is a production of Skylight.

ABOUT SKYLIGHT

For over 30 years, Skylight has been committed to producing artistic, challenging and socially relevant media to strengthen human rights and the quest for justice. Through the use of media, technology and digital tools, we seek to engage, educate and increase understanding of human rights and social justice amongst the public at large, educators, and policy makers. Skylight is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.

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