



**For immediate release:
500 YEARS is Headed to Theaters**

*The third installment in the Guatemalan resistance trilogy, **500 YEARS**, is resonating with audiences on each of its festival stops, and is now opening in select cities in the U.S.*

After a successful run on the festival circuit, receiving standing ovations at every stop and five sold out screenings at its Sundance world premiere, **500 YEARS** is finally coming to theaters in select cities across the country. U.S. theatrical premieres are set to take place on July 12th at New York's IFC Center, followed by a July 28th opening at Los Angeles' Laemmle's Monica Film Center in Santa Monica and Laemmle's Playhouse 7 in Pasadena.

500 YEARS is the third and final installment in Director **Pamela Yates** and **Skylight's** epic trilogy on Mayan indigenous resistance in Guatemala, **The Resistance Saga**, which began with [When the Mountains Tremble](#) (1983), followed by [Granito: How to Nail a Dictator](#) (2011). The new film tells the sweeping story that led Guatemala to a tipping point in their history, from the genocide trial of former dictator General Ríos Montt to the popular movement that toppled sitting President Otto Pérez Molina. Focusing on universal themes of justice, racism, power and corruption, **500 YEARS** tells the story from the perspective of the majority indigenous Mayan population in Guatemala, and explores their struggles in the country's growing fight against impunity.

With the recent announcement of **Paladin's** acquisition of the film's U.S. theatrical rights in [Variety](#), **500 YEARS** is already making plans to open in other cities —beyond the first two that have just been announced.

Mark Urman, president of Paladin, says, "**500 YEARS** is both inspirational and indispensable in showing how people who share a common cause can effect change, proving that, under the right circumstances, right makes might. Pamela is a consummate storyteller who succeeds in making history visually engaging, dramatically enthralling and, most importantly, utterly universal. We know that American audiences want —and need— to see this film, and we are thrilled to be bringing it to theaters."

Recently, the entire **Resistance Saga** trilogy was presented as a special day-long immersive event on June 11th at the Human Rights Watch Film Festival at The Film Society of Lincoln Center. The cinematic portion of the day ended once more in standing ovations by the New York audience, and was then followed by a Q&A with Yates, Kinoy, and Mayan activists **Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj** and **Andrea Ixchiú**. Later this year, the documentary will then have its global streaming premiere on Amazon as part of its new *Festival Stars* initiative, timed to coincide with awards season.

500 YEARS launched into the world, and enthusiastic crowds connected with the film's story of sustained nonviolent resistance, pointedly resonant in the wake of the Trump inauguration. People kept saying, "this is what's happening to us —the Guatemalan story is our story!" The Mayans teach us that life in resistance is a state of being, that requires resilience to endure setbacks such as the Trump election, and solidarity to achieve inspiring historic moments like those portrayed in **500 YEARS**.

At the Human Rights Watch Film Festival in London and the International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights in Geneva, Ixchiú, a Mayan activist in her 20's, wowed audiences at post-



screening Q&As. Euronews called the documentary “one of the highlights of the festival” in Geneva. Similarly, Velásquez Nimatuj, an anthropologist and indigenous rights activist, presented the film at the Full Frame Documentary Festival where she engaged with viewers in a thought provoking conversation about long-term resistance. At the Ashland Independent Film Festival in Oregon, Skylight, represented by Director Pamela Yates and Executive Director Paco de Onís, was honored for their 35-year-long commitment to producing artistic, challenging, and socially relevant work to strengthen human rights.

FILM OVERVIEW

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 Ríos 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 Ixchíu, 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 35 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.

CONTACT

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For more information on the film, visit: 500years.skylight.is

To download press materials, click [here](#).

Watch the trailer, here: youtu.be/wbKPSlzBQPc.

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