



## An Unprecedented Uprising Against Impunity in Guatemala

**President Pérez Molina has resigned amid a broad-based movement against corruption**

*“Guatemala is at a crossroads, but not because of the current crisis. Guatemala has been at a crossroads since impunity has been, essentially, state policy.”*

- Iduvina Hernández

A massive tax fraud scheme exposed in Guatemala this April might once have been viewed as business as usual in a country that has struggled with corruption at the highest levels for decades.

Instead, Guatemalans got angry.

A protest organized via social media quickly erupted, sparking an ongoing wave of demonstrations that’s drawn the participation of tens of thousands. For the first time in Guatemala’s recent history, a broad cross section of society – including politicians, students from both private and public universities, the country’s powerful business lobby, indigenous peoples, and members of a historically passive middle class – joined together in a unified call for the removal of corrupt officials.

Vice President Roxana Baldetti, whose personal secretary was identified as the leader of the fraud ring, was the first to step down on May 8. As investigations continued, at least 20 high-level officials in a number of major executive branch offices resigned or were fired. Many of the ousted officials are members of Pérez Molina’s inner circle and are under investigation for various acts of alleged corruption.

These ministry shake-ups were not enough to quell calls for the president’s resignation, and weekly protests continued to fill Guatemala City’s central plaza from mid-April until September. With the curtain pulled back to expose what many have called one of the most corrupt administrations in Guatemala’s history, the country faced its biggest political crisis in years – just before September’s general elections.

On August 21, corruption investigations reached the highest levels of government as public prosecutors and the CICIG named President Otto Pérez Molina and former Vice President Baldetti as the head of the customs fraud network. Baldetti is in police custody, and will face prosecution for illicit association, customs fraud and accepting bribes. Pérez Molina, who had maintained

*Parts of this article originally appeared in Foreign Policy in Focus and TeleSUR | (continued on page 3)*



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## **GHRC Mission**

The Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC) is a nonprofit, grassroots, solidarity organization dedicated to promoting human rights in Guatemala and supporting communities and activists who face threats and violence. GHRC documents and denounces abuses, educates the international community, and advocates for policies that foster peace and justice.

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## **Letter from the Director**

Dear Supporters,

Guatemalans are demanding change – and for the first time in many years, it feels possible. Every week since mid April, a diverse cross-section of Guatemalan civil society has marched and rallied in front of the National Palace (and around the country), denouncing corruption and demanding reform.

On May 16, I witnessed a rally of an estimated 60,000 people gathered in central Guatemala City – students, indigenous peoples, upper class families, former government ministers, human rights groups. And on August 27, over 100,000 took to the streets. The atmosphere was jolly and upbeat as protesters called for, amongst numerous demands, the resignation of President Otto Pérez Molina.

While the elections are still set for September 6, intense public pressure – in concert with the unprecedented investigations by the CICIG and public prosecutors into government corruption and other criminal activity – has resulted in a cascade of firings, resignations and prosecutions of high level officials.

Many of those under investigation have close ties to the president, who himself had his immunity from prosecution repealed by congress, and subsequently stepped down on September 2. For months, the US government stood by Pérez Molina as he refused to step down, causing widespread accusations that the US has been the one pulling the strings.

Not surprisingly, US interests seem focused not on finding the best outcome for Guatemalans, but in trying to patch up a government that can appear ready to partner with the US in the new “Alliance for Prosperity” plan for the Northern Triangle. The plan seeks to reduce migration from Central America by increasing access to employment and state services, building up infrastructure and strengthening public institutions. As we discuss in this issue, the plan has been problematic from the get-go, and is misguided in both its approach and focus. Guatemalans deserve investment in healthy sustainable communities – but this plan is unlikely to benefit the majority of the population, and certainly not the most vulnerable. GHRC has been involved in ongoing advocacy on the issue, led by our newest staff member, Andrew Fandino, who introduces himself in this issue.

Meanwhile, the struggle for justice for crimes of the past moves forward in fits and starts. The high risk courts remain generally unperturbed by the recent exposure of a network of corrupt judges, but the genocide case has been delayed again, this time because it was ruled that Ríos Montt is mentally unfit to stand trial. Nevertheless, the historic case of sexual slavery and sexual violence at Sepur Zarco has made important strides. We highlighted this case during our recent speaking tour in Oregon and D.C.

For the Guatemalan defenders of women’s rights, land rights and justice, the current crisis presents an immense opportunity to create a political system that is more representative of the population and responds more effectively to popular demands. The efforts to rid the Guatemalan government of corruption is a good place to start, and in my seven years at GHRC, I haven’t seen such a diverse coalition so united and energized around any single issue. Alongside our ongoing work to push the US to support human rights in the region, one of the most important things you and I can do is ask our government to simply let Guatemalans decide the way forward.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Alford-Jones  
Executive Director



*(continued from page 1) | Photo: Nelton Rivera/Prensa Comunitaria*

that he would not step down, had his immunity revoked on September 1, paving the way for prosecution. Then, in a remarkably quick succession of events, a warrant was issued for Pérez Molina's arrest, and he publicly announced his resignation just hours later. The first court hearing began on September 3, where Pérez Molina will face charges of criminal conspiracy, fraud and accepting bribes.

### **Corruption Exposed**

The initial scandal that sparked public disapproval involves a criminal network that's been called La Línea, or "The Line," in reference to a certain cell phone number importers called to negotiate the amount they paid in customs taxes. Thanks to the network, businesses could receive an illegal "discount" on the required fees when their property cleared customs.

Approximately 50 percent of the fee was paid to the state; a portion then went to a network of defrauders that included corrupt officials and their collaborators, and the rest was kept by the importer as savings.

On April 16, authorities arrested 22 people – including the current and former heads of Guatemala's tax collection agency. The eight-month investigation was a joint effort between Guatemala's

Public Prosecutor's Office and the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a UN-backed institution charged with investigating and helping disband clandestine and parallel power structures linked to the state.

Prosecutors estimate that Guatemala lost at least \$120 million in tax revenue in the eight-month period to the scam. And as the investigation continues to unfold, it has revealed an inter-connected web of judicial corruption that's been nicknamed the "Law Firm of Impunity," resulting in investigations into judges and justices on Guatemala's Supreme Court.

"The parallel power structure that has been revealed through the CICIG's investigations is derived precisely from the existence of a larger 'pact of impunity,'" said Iduvina Hernández, a political analyst, columnist, and the executive director of the Association for the Study and Promotion of Security in Democracy.

This "pact of impunity" is referenced frequently in Guatemala to signal the ways that members of powerful sectors work together to protect their resources, influence, and immunity to prosecution. Often this occurs at the expense of the poor. In the case of La Línea, for example, individuals at the top of the chain

allegedly raked in millions of dollars per year while state institutions lacked important resources for medicine, education, and basic security.

It was this dramatic contrast that inspired many to protest. A massive demonstration on May 16 – some 60,000 strong – expressed anger at the country's deep inequalities, as protesters held signs illustrating what income lost to La Línea could have provided in public services.

Just a week later, a second investigation by CICIG and the Public Prosecutor's Office revealed another corruption scandal within Guatemala's Social Security Institute, or IGSS.

The institute had awarded a kidney dialysis contract to the company Droguería Pisa in exchange for kickbacks to government officials, including IGSS employees and the head of the Guatemalan Central Bank. Pisa had no expertise providing the treatment, and at least 36 people have since died. Seventeen public officials and other collaborators have been arrested, but most notable was the arrest of the president of the board of the IGSS, Juan de Dios Rodríguez – a powerful former military man who once served as Pérez Molina's private secretary.

*(continued on pages 4-5)*

*(continued from page 3)*



*A family at one of the protests in Guatemala City. Photo: Nelton Rivera/Prensa Comunitaria*

### **Guatemala's General Elections**

Just days after former President Otto Pérez Molina resigned and was sent to jail, Guatemalans took to the polls on September 6 to elect a new leader.

The pool of presidential hopefuls had largely left voters feeling deflated, and citizens have struggled to identify a legitimate candidate. Many analysts cautioned that swapping one politician for another will not address deep concerns over systemic corruption, and in the weeks leading up to Election Day, the call for “voto nulo” – or a null vote – grew in urban areas.

“What we need is not a new candidate,” said Hernández, “but to change fundamentally how the game of politics is played.”

A recent CICIG report found that on average, 50 percent of money in Guatemalan politics comes from corruption and 25 percent directly from organized crime.

These revelations only serve to confirm what Guatemalans already know: candidates often fund campaigns through illicit activity or through donations from criminal enterprises, and once in office, use state institutions and taxpayer dollars to enrich themselves and

their networks.

Two of the biggest parties, UNE and LIDER, were also charged with exceeding legal spending limits on their campaigns and have been mentioned by the CICIG for the use of illicit campaign money.

Doubts about candidates’ legitimacy are compounded by the problems that occur during every election cycle in Guatemala: election-related violence, manipulation of the voter registry (there hasn’t been an official census since 2002), vote-buying, and ballot-burning in scattered municipalities.

A campaign to call for the postponement of elections began months ago, when doing so would have been within constitutional bounds. If the US hadn’t stepped in to support Pérez Molina and push for elections to move forward as planned, they may well have been suspended under the weight of public pressure.

Despite the widespread calls to delay elections until meaningful reforms could be made, the demand was ultimately rejected by Guatemala’s election authority, and polls opened as planned on September 6.

Prior to the revelation of the corruption scandals, and for months

leading up to the elections, polls showed LIDER candidate Manuel Manuel Baldizón to be the country’s clear favorite. Even though Baldizón is widely thought to be connected to illicit activity in Petén, and had been criticized for representing “politics as usual,” it seemed inevitable that he would win the first round of elections.

However, as Baldizón’s vice presidential candidate Edgar Barquín was accused of corruption, his popularity plummeted in the weeks leading up to the 6. And as anti-establishment sentiment continued to grow, many predicted that Guatemalans would cast blank votes, or boycott the elections entirely. Instead, citizens came out in record numbers to propel Jimmy Morales, a comedian with zero political experience, to a surprise first-round win.

Though he markets himself as a political outsider, Morales is – ironically – backed by the same military that has come to be associated with Pérez Molina himself. Critics have been quick to point out that members of the FCN party, which Jimmy Morales represents, have been linked to war crimes from the internal armed conflict. Morales has also been specifically linked to Edgar Justino Ovalle, who served as a high-ranking military commander in Guatemala’s Quiché region during the height of the conflict. According to declassified documents, when Ovalle was in power, at least 77 massacres were carried out in Quiché.

Though initially locked in a neck in neck race, former First Lady Sandra Torres inched past Baldizón to take the second place slot. Many consider Torres to be one of the “least worst” candidates; however, she has also earned criticism for her political and economic connections.

On October 25, Morales and Torres will compete in a run-off election.

## What's Next For Guatemala?

Whoever is elected as Guatemala's next president will face a multitude of challenges, including an exploding financial crisis, seriously delegitimized State agencies, and a citizenry that is not afraid to demand serious reforms.

One other scenario that has been discussed, but at this point looks unlikely, is to convoke a "National Constituent Assembly" – a group of citizens named to initiate a process to draft a new constitution.

"There are many groups interested in changing the Constitution," said Anabella Sibrián, Central American representative for the International Platform Against Impunity. "Guatemala could stand to gain or lose a lot depending on how the process unfolds and the correlation of political forces at the time the assembly is convoked."

Meanwhile, corruption is only one piece of the puzzle. Many groups have taken the opportunity to draw links between current scandals and other ongoing concerns — including a record level of attacks against human rights defenders, a level of aggression against the press not witnessed in a decade, and the blatant manipulation of the selection of judges in 2014.

"Guatemala is at a crossroads, but not because of the current crisis," Hernández explained. "Guatemala has been at a crossroads since impunity has been, essentially, state policy."

## Will the US Continue "Business as Usual"?

As Guatemalans demand widespread reform, the United States also has an important opportunity to reevaluate the role it can play in supporting meaningful change.

The US government has been a

consistent supporter of Pérez Molina, himself a very controversial figure. He is the subject of an open investigation into his alleged involvement in the torture and assassination of guerilla leader Everardo Bámaca in the early 1990s, and many have raised questions about his possible participation in acts of genocide against the indigenous Ixil population in the 1980s. During his 3.5 years in office, the US has also worked closely with his administration to "strengthen" institutions, improve prisons, and bulk up security.

At the same time, the prisons have been through numerous scandals, and the security forces – both military and police – have been responsible for a number of extrajudicial executions and widespread corruption. Along with the urgent need to reform laws related to Guatemala's political parties and elections, strengthening the independence and capacity of the judiciary is one of the most important next steps to address the country's myriad of problems. And some US officials have stressed a commitment to supporting justice.

Yet overall, US policy has been largely focused on "security" and, most recently, on preventing migration from the region.

The US Congress is considering a funding request from President Barack Obama for investment in Central America following last summer's wave of unaccompanied child migrants; the proposed funding package closely mirrors the objectives of a parallel plan, called the "Alliance for Prosperity for the Northern Triangle," which was created by the region's three presidents and the Inter-American Development Bank. **(Read more about the plan on page 9).**

Civil society organizations from throughout the hemisphere have expressed grave concerns about the plan, including a lack of civil society participation in its formation and worries that it could actually exacerbate poverty and violence.

Organizations in both the US and Central America are watching closely to see how the US will engage in Guatemala given the government's loss of legitimacy. Nevertheless, in a country that hasn't seen such diverse and massive protests in many years, there is hope in Guatemala that sustained public outcry could create a space for long-term change. The United States, too, should make sure that its own policies provide real support for efforts to dismantle corruption and strengthen justice.

### Senate Foreign Assistance Budget Contains Important Restrictions on Aid to Guatemala

**On Thursday, July 9, the Senate passed a foreign assistance budget allocating \$675 million for Central America, with \$142 million designated specifically for Guatemala. The bill contains important restrictions, conditions and reporting requirements for Guatemala – including no funds to the Guatemalan Army. Conditioning US funds based on compliance with human rights investigations and accountability is one thing GHRC and our partners advocate for every year as a tool to leverage positive change in Guatemala, and we were pleased to see many of our recommendations included in the Senate Bill.**

**In contrast, the House version of the budget, which was approved June 11, allocated \$296 million to Central America and included no human rights conditions. In the coming months, the House and Senate will try to come to an agreement about the budget. At a minimum, any funding approved for Guatemala should include the human rights conditions proposed by the Senate.**

# Saluting Women Survivors

*How women are leading the way in the search for justice in Guatemala*



*“Justice is about saying what happened.” “Justice is equality.” “Justice is telling my story.” “Justice is having dignity.” “Justice is that these events never repeat.” “We are recuperating our social fabric.”*

- Testimonies from participants in the 2015 transitional justice workshop

In ever-greater numbers, women in Guatemala are choosing to break the silence about the violence they have suffered.

In early February 2015, GHRC held a workshop with women survivors of Guatemala’s 36-year-long internal armed conflict, now leaders in various communities from Huehuetenango, Quiché, Baja Verapaz, Escuintla, Izabal and Guatemala City. The meeting marked the culmination of an 18-month project carried out by MADRE, based in New York, and GHRC to investigate the roles that women play in transitional justice processes in both Guatemala and Colombia, and to support the women’s diverse initiatives.

During the February meeting, the women spoke resolutely about the need for justice. “Justice,” said one survivor, “is about saying what happened.” “Justice is equality, of access to education, health, land, and equality before the law.” “Justice

is about being able to tell my story.” “Justice is having dignity.” “Justice is that these events never repeat.” “We are recuperating our social fabric.” “Our vengeance is being happy.”

Maria, a survivor and witness in the Ixil genocide case, spoke of her commitment to testify against Ríos Montt again. Máxima, from a community near Rabinal, shared how women in the region are gearing up take their case to court. Sandra, a survivor of the Dos Erres massacre in Petén and witness in the case, spoke about the initial struggle of feeling ashamed and helpless because of what had happened to her.

“I didn’t know how to speak out, how to join other victims in protest,” she said. “But now our rights are being respected, and we are fighting for them.”

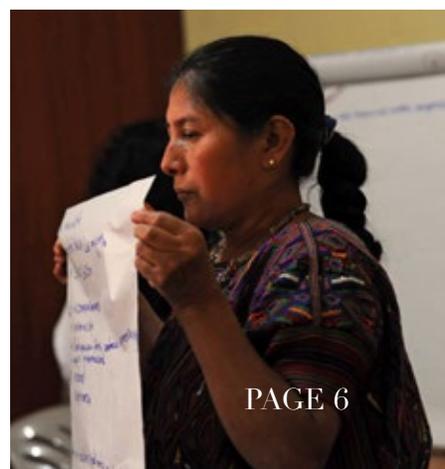
This transformation from isolation to empowerment was a key theme throughout the process, which

included two gatherings for women in their home countries, and one in Bogotá to bring together Guatemalan and Colombian women.

All three workshops served foremost as a place for women to share their individual testimonies and promote processes for healing. The space also allowed women to review current community initiatives and exchange ideas about strategies to access justice and address impunity. Finally, the meeting in Bogotá also allowed participants from each country to create support links in order to enrich the existing practices of their community groups.

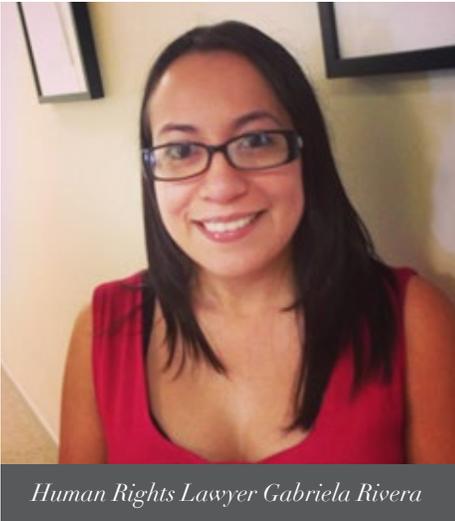
At the end of the meeting in February 2015, Sandra made a call of action to the other participants, as well as to all women who have been victims of violence.

“Let’s stand up,” she said. “Because we know what was done to us, and we want justice.”



Photos: Cristina Chiquín

## GHRC Brings Feminist Lawyer to US to Discusses Ground-breaking Sexual Slavery Case



*Human Rights Lawyer Gabriela Rivera*

For the first time in Guatemala, a criminal case of sexual violence and sexual slavery during the internal armed conflict is moving forward in court.

The case is being led by a group of 15 Q'eqchi women survivors and lawyers from the feminist organization Women Transforming the World (MTM). The women were held at a military outpost during the early 1980s, and forced to cook and clean for soldiers stationed at the Sepur Zarco outpost in the Polochic Valley in eastern Guatemala. They were also raped repeatedly, abuses that lasted – for some – over a period of years. Four of the 15 managed to flee into to the mountains. Now in their 70s and 80s, this group of survivors is committed to seeking justice.

MTM lawyer Gabriela Rivera, who works on the Sepur Zarco case, came to the US in April during GHRC's spring speaker's tour, presenting at venues in Portland and Corvallis, Oregon and Washington, DC.

"All the women in the case speak their native language, Q'eqchi,' – they don't speak Spanish. They never went to school, they never learned to read and write, and they are extremely poor," Gabriela told audiences at universities and

churches in Oregon. "But they want to do everything in their power to ensure this doesn't happen again."

The charges were initially filed in 2011 by the Alliance to Break Silence and Impunity, a coalition which includes MTM, the National Union of Guatemalan Women (UNAMG) and psychosocial support organization ECAP.

In 2012, the women made history by becoming the first to give testimony in a Guatemalan court about sexual violence during the conflict. The testimonies were given as pre-trial statements, an option used when there is concern that the witness may not live to see the trial. Two former military men were indicted in 2014, on charges of war crimes, forced disappearance and assassination.

Gabriela explained that in the early 1980s, it was efforts of local farmers to get legal title to their land (not armed insurgency) that prompted the Guatemalan military to place an outpost on a large private landholding in Sepur Zarco. And land conflict in the region is a problem that persists today.

"Palm oil plantations stretch as far as the eye can see around Sepur Zarco," explained Gabriela, noting how palm and large sugar cane plantations have threatened subsistence farming practiced by the Q'eqchi' communities.

In this way, the Sepur Zarco case – though focused on justice for past crimes – also calls attention to ongoing and current conflicts in the region, including violent evictions of communities.

MTM has been creative in framing of the case, using arguments based on both national and international law, and seeking to deepen the definition of 'war crimes' by including the individual crimes committed as part

of the formal complaint.

In their work with the women survivors, technically their clients, they have also used unique strategies.

"The women lead the process," Gaby explained at Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland. "They had no prior understanding of how the legal process works, but we do not use a hierarchical, lawyer-client relationship. As lawyers, we simply use our education to help the women understand their options. They decide what they want to do and then we try to put those decisions into action."

It isn't easy, nor is there any guarantee of the case ever reaching a verdict. Guatemala's high rates of impunity – particularly for cases from the armed conflict – can be discouraging, and cases that implicate military personnel are often met with slander campaigns, delay tactics, and sometimes threats against the survivors or their lawyers.

Yet despite all odds, the Sepur Zarco case is advancing in Guatemala's High Risk Court system, a testament to the persistence and dedication of the women and MTM lawyers. Judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez, who is overseeing the evidentiary stage of the process, has also earned immense respect for his independence, willingness to incorporate international legal concepts, and his respectful treatment of the women in the courtroom.

In June 2015, after months of delays, Judge Galvez ruled to accept extensive documentary evidence, witness testimony, and numerous expert testimonies put forward by the prosecution. The case is set to go to trial sometime in early 2016, and will be heard by the judges that presided over the genocide case.

## HUMAN RIGHTS CASE UPDATES

### La Puya:

### US Company Maintains Production at El Tambor Mine Despite Guatemalan Court Order to Suspend Operations

On July 15, a Guatemalan court ruled in favor of local residents by ordering the suspension of KCA's construction activity at the El Tambor mine until a community consultation is held and residents approve the project. The court found that KCA's Guatemalan subsidiary, Exmingua, has been operating the mine without valid permits from the municipality of San Pedro Ayampuc, where the mine is located.

In response to the ruling, the municipality ordered the company to halt construction within a period of 15 days. GHRC also sent an open letter to KCA President Daniel Kappes, signed by 2,200 individuals from over 65 countries (the petition now has almost 4,500 signers) calling on the company to comply with the court ruling.

In a public interview with VICE News, Daniel Kappes revealed that the company has appealed the court sentence, and will continue production at the mine. Kappes called the court order a "moot point," considering that construction at the mine has already been completed.

Residents from around the mine site have stood in nonviolent resistance to El Tambor since they first learned of the project, and continue to oppose the project. They have maintained a 24-hour, 365-day a year vigil – a movement which has become known as "La Puya" – at the entrance to the mine for over three years. Members of La Puya are demanding that their government address serious concerns of water contamination, environmental degradation and the right to community consultation.

"The company presented an invalid construction permit," said Miriam Pixtún, a representative from the Puya. "It's important that KCA respect the sentence rather than continue to promote corruption and impunity in Guatemala."



Left: Mining equipment at El Tambor; Right: The permanent police presence at La Puya

### The Genocide Case

On August 25, judges ruled that the retrial against Efraín Ríos Montt and Rodriguez Sanchez will move forward. On August 18, Montt was diagnosed with "incurable" dementia – the culmination of a series of psychiatric evaluations that had delayed the trial for weeks and threatened to shut down the case. Despite the fact that Montt is unable to appear in court, a closed-door trial will move forward with witnesses (but will not be open to the public). Judges also ordered that the physician who has been treating Montt be investigated for possible medical negligence and for potentially endangering his life.

Montt's legal team will represent him in court, and the next hearing is set for January 11, 2016.

### Totonicapán Massacre

On October 4, 2012, approximately 15,000 members of the indigenous communities in Totonicapán, Guatemala gathered to block five key transit points on the Pan-American Highway to protest the excessive electricity prices, changes to the professional teacher training requirements, and proposed constitutional reforms. A military contingent of 89 soldiers confronted the protestors. As a result, six protestors were killed, 40 were wounded by the military, and one of the protestors was disappeared during the confrontation. The Totonicapán massacre was the first by the military since the war.

After years of delays, Judge Carol Patricia Flores has confirmed that the nine soldiers involved will be charged with murder in self-defense ("en estado de emocion violenta"), rather than for extrajudicial execution. Flores herself faces allegations put forward by the CICIG and Public Ministry of illicit enrichment and money laundering. The Supreme Court will soon decide if Flores should face criminal investigation.

## What Is the Alliance for Prosperity Plan?

**The Alliance for Prosperity Plan for the Northern Triangle (AFP) – a plan promoted by the governments of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador and drafted with the technical support of the Inter-American Development Bank – began as a response to the record numbers of unaccompanied child migrants that arrived at the US border in 2014, and has become an effort to promote long-term “development” for the region.**

**For the first time in many years, Guatemala figures among the top foreign policy priorities for the United States, which has pledged substantial financial backing for the Plan. Unfortunately – though not surprisingly – this will likely not result in positive change, but in increasing militarization and economic exclusion.**



*Photo: Tico Times*

## GHRC Raises Concerns About the AFP

GHRC has shared serious concerns about the Alliance for Prosperity with Congressional Offices, the State Department, the White House and with the constant flow of public officials and private sector advocates from Guatemala who have traveled to Washington to promote their plan. In contrast, the plan was developed with little to no input from Guatemalan civil society – an issue we denounced in a public letter with 75 signers from the region – and Guatemalan officials in charge of developing this plan have yet to visit the target municipalities to present the proposal and get feedback from affected communities. (Months after the plan was developed the government was finally pressured into opening up consultations, which to date have been with a limited number of organizations based in Guatemala City.

**Big benefits for big business:** The AFP Plan is written with – and for – big business, and will do little to improve living conditions for the vast majority of Guatemalans. It will generate more conflict by imposing large-scale projects such as bigger highways and hydroelectric dams, projects that have already led to forced evictions, violence and intense community conflict. Meanwhile, the right to consultation, a demand made by communities across Guatemala, has been given lip service but appears nowhere in official documents. Having been drafted to address the number one priority for the United States, reducing migration, the plan aims for a “quick fix” to deter or prevent Central Americans from migrating north, including generating new private sector jobs with no accompanying infrastructure to protect labor rights. (Guatemala is currently facing arbitration from the US for failure to enforce labor laws.)

**Bulking up security:** As the US increases security at its own borders, it has also been investing heavily in border security further south, providing trainings for Guatemalan security forces, encouraging militarization of its borders to crack down on smugglers – a category that includes “coyotes” who are paid to lead migrants north. The US has also funded massive publicity campaigns to discourage people from migrating, with little recognition that many in the region are fleeing for their lives and have legitimate international protection claims.

**Weak institutional reforms:** The institutional reforms suggested in the AFP are superficial and weak when compared to the depth and breadth of the change needed to impact people’s lives. Some of the strategic actions – improving access to justice, improving transparency, addressing corruption – could bring positive change if implemented well. However, the reforms in the plan are being proposed and would be carried out by a government that has been turned inside out by corruption scandals and in which the very individuals and institutions who pitch the plan are illegitimate representatives of Guatemalan citizenry.

The challenges Guatemala faces are complex, historic, and deeply rooted. The symptoms of these structural problems include family and community disintegration, high rates of generalized violence and social conflict, domestic violence, organized crime, outmigration, and a myriad of related social problems. These challenges were not resolved with the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords; economic equality and opportunity did not increase with the US-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA); and people are not safer after the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). Instead, structural and criminal violence have become more acute over the past decade. The Alliance for Prosperity will be no different.

## VOICELESS SPEAK FUND:

Recognizing the work of  
our 2014-2015 recipients



Since 1987, the Voiceless Speak Fund has provided direct assistance to Guatemalans interested in educating the public in the US about the human rights situation in Guatemala or organizing in their communities in the US to defend the rights of Guatemalans living here. For more information, please visit [www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org).

GHRC is proud to recognize the recipients of the 2014-2015 Voiceless Speak Fund grants: **Leobardo Ajtzalam, Rogelia Cruz, Josefina Gomez, Zully Juarez, Juanita Cabrera Lopez, Catarina Lorenzo, Luis Marcos, and Concepcion Santay.**

Several of this cycle's grant recipients are using Voiceless Speak funds to carry out initiatives aimed at educating US audiences about human rights issues in Guatemala: Josefina hosted seminars for students at universities in the Houston area; Concepción organized educational events along the US West Coast; and Catarina led a series of workshops for Guatemalans living near Providence, Rhode Island. Leobardo is using an online community radio program he created, *Voces sin Fronteras*, to discuss social justice issues with groups in the US and in Guatemala, and Zully organized a film screening and panel discussion on genocide and Mayan resistance. Luis has worked to highlight the presence of First Peoples in the western hemisphere, creating links between indigenous groups in Omaha, Nebraska and the region of Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

### More Highlights from the 2014-2015 Voiceless Speak Projects:



**CONCEPCION SANTAY GOMEZ & GIOVANNI BATZ** used funds from GHRC's Voiceless Speak Program to support a project to educate university students and others about human rights issues related to the construction of megaprojects in Guatemala. Concepcion and Giovanni organized a speaking tour along the West Coast of the US to share information on his native community's efforts to prevent mega-mining projects from being constructed in the El Quiché region of Guatemala. The pair visited four universities, including the University of Southern California and California State University-Northridge, and three community organizations dedicated to human rights and environmental justice.



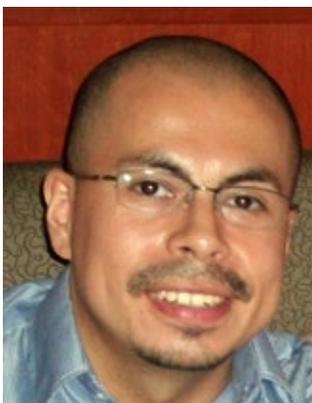
**CATARINA LORENZO ANTONIO** organized and led a series of workshops for Guatemalans living in or around Providence, Rhode Island, targeted especially to immigrants enrolled in the "English in Action" language program. The workshops focused on a variety of topics – including megadevelopment projects, domestic violence, and racism. While many of the attendees were Guatemalan, participants from the US and other Latin American countries also attended. "Sharing information about social conflicts caused by megadevelopment projects is really important," said Catarina, "both for educating Guatemalans living away from their native land as well as to inform the general public about what's happening in Guatemala."



**LEOBARDO AJTZALAM** has used his radio show, *Voces sin Fronteras* (Voices Without Borders) to broadcast to an audience of 5,000+ individuals in Guatemala and in the US on various topics related to human rights. In November, Leobardo organized a radio program aimed at drawing links between the searches for justice for the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa, Mexico and searches for the disappeared in Guatemala, as well as building solidarity between the two movements. In the spring of 2015, Leobardo also participated in the 14th session of the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues, where he spoke on a panel about the importance of community radio and the ongoing persecution of community radio stations in Guatemala.

## GHRC's Newest Staff Member: Meet Andrew Fandino

It was back in 2003, while I was attending the annual Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) White House vigil, when I first learned of the amazing work of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission. A close friend of mine had asked me to help bring some Colombian torture survivors to participate in that year's event. Every story was just a moving as the next, but one that I remember very vividly was that of Sister Dianna Ortiz.



*Andrew Fandino*

It would not be until 2007, when I was working with Peace Brigades International/USA in Washington, DC, that I would cross paths with GHRC again. I was in charge of all the advocacy work in DC for PBI's projects in Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia, Nepal, and Indonesia, and I naturally sought out to work closely with GHRC on the protection of human rights defenders in Guatemala.

I was greatly impressed by the work done by GHRC and its leadership role in what was then known as the Guatemala Working Group. I had the opportunity to do many joint meetings with the then Co-Director of GHRC, Marty Jordan. It was during one of these rounds of joint meetings with Congressional offices, that I had the honor to meet two of GHRC's Guatemalan human rights partners, Angelica González from CALDH and Claudia Samayoa from UDEFEGUA.

Up until that point, I had spent 10 years working on Colombia for such organizations as Amazon Watch,

Peace Brigades International/ Colombia Project, the US Office on Colombia, and Human Rights Watch. But in 2009, I moved half way around the world, and spent the next five years in Southeast Asia, living and working in Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma.

Most recently I worked as the development director at the Burma Border Projects, and before that, I founded my own NGO, called the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights. As the Executive Director of the CPHR, I investigated and reported on numerous different human rights issues throughout Southeast Asia, focusing principally on the situation of Burmese refugees, the abuse of female domestic workers, election campaigns, human trafficking, and racial and religious discrimination and intolerance.

Because of the extremely sensitive and politically volatile nature of my research and documentation of human rights violations, I received

72 death threats in Cambodia alone from members and leaders of the xenophobic opposition hate group called the Cambodia National Rescue Party. I was forced to leave the area I had come to call home for years, and at the end of 2014, I made my way back to DC and started looking for a job.

Luckily for me, one of the first job advertisements that I saw was for the position of Advocacy and Development Coordinator at the Guatemala Human Rights Commission. It was a perfect fit, joining the two things I love to do and had been doing for the last 17 years of my career. Best yet, the position was with an organization I deeply respected and admired.

I started working with GHRC in February of this year and have loved the work. The GHRC team is great, and I've had the pleasure of seeing many faces I recognize from years ago as well as meeting many new people. It has been a hectic first few months, with many meetings, coalition work, and an intense immersion in all things Guatemala. One of the best things about working with GHRC has been the extremely close relationships we have with some of the most courageous and inspiring human rights defenders in Guatemala. Doing rounds of meetings with these defenders has been extremely rewarding and humbling. I look forward to the year ahead and being able to help GHRC grow as much as possible.

## GHRC Honors Community Media Group with 2015 Alice Zachmann Award

GHRC is proud to announce that this year's Alice Zachmann Human Rights Defenders Award will be presented to Prensa Comunitaria (Community Press) on Nov. 3 at St. Stephen's Church in Washington, DC. Prensa Comunitaria is a network of correspondents who work to document issues affecting residents' lives and highlight under-reported community movements. GHRC will also carry out a speaking tour this fall to highlight the important work of community media groups in Guatemala, especially in a context of heightened violence against journalists. ***Please stay tuned for more information about these events, scheduled for November 1-15, 2015. We'll be coming to the Midwest (Illinois, Ohio) as well as DC and NY. Check our website for updates: [www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org).***



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*Photo: Nelton Rivera/Prensa Comunitaria*



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