



# Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

March 2023

In recent years, Guatemala has seen an alarming increase in human rights violations that advocates describe as unprecedented in the period following the internal armed conflict. In its 2021 Human Rights Report, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) classified Guatemala as a state that systematically violates human rights, warning that “the systematic interference in the independence of the judiciary, the weakening of human rights institutions, and the increasingly evident setbacks in the fight against corruption and impunity have an impact, in turn, on democratic stability and the very exercise of human rights by the Guatemalan people.” As a result, attacks on defenders have soared. In the first two years of the Giammattei administration, 2,646 attacks against defenders have been recorded.

This year is on track to continue this trend of rising violence. According to mid-year data from the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (UDEFEQUA), 589 attacks against defenders have already occurred in the first six months of 2022.

Meanwhile, President Giammattei himself faces investigations into corruption in two separate cases.

## Key concerns:

- ◆ The breakdown of rule of law, key pillars of democracy, and complete co-optation of institutions which leaves defenders vulnerable
- ◆ Political violence, likely to worsen with the upcoming elections
- ◆ Increased use of criminalization against journalists, human rights defenders, etc. as a means of silencing dissent;
- ◆ The resurgence of violent attacks and evictions against defenders and Indigenous communities, particularly around land conflicts.

Stronger action is needed to curb these worrisome trends and support those on the front lines of defending human rights.

## We recommend the following actions for the US government to take:

- ◆ Publicly support the work of human rights defenders, especially those facing criminalization and attacks. In public statements, express concern not only for high level justice sector workers but also for transitional justice lawyers, journalists, and Indigenous land defenders. Within Guatemala, send embassy personnel to hearings for emblematic human rights cases.
- ◆ Robustly communicate to Guatemalan officials the importance of maintaining key pillars of democracy, such as: freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of expression. Raise specific concerns over the closing of civil space, as well as criminalization and rising violence against defenders.
- ◆ Suspend all security assistance to Guatemala, including any training, equipping, or funding to the Guatemalan armed forces and the National Civil Police until security forces implicated in human rights abuses are brought to justice and rates of human rights abuses fall significantly.
- ◆ Reevaluate all pending loans and aid to be sent to Guatemala via US institutions and/or international financial institutions. Ensure that no funds are distributed to actors engaged in corruption or human rights violations.
- ◆ Reconsider all US government investments into Guatemala, including from the US Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the Vice President’s Call to Action, and the Partnership for Central America, prioritizing the proper application of safeguards to prevent further human rights violations. Suspend all investments into megaprojects until the State can guarantee its adherence to international human rights standards.
- ◆ Reframe the narrative around root causes of migration, acknowledging that migration is driven not only by lack of economic opportunity in Guatemala but also by government corruption, the increasing persecution of human rights defenders, and the deterioration of the rule of law.