



Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA

**3321 12th ST NE
Washington DC, 20017**

www.ghrc-usa.org

202-998-2191

GHRC recently had the pleasure to sit down with Raúl Molina Mejía, co-founder and secretary general for political affairs of the Network for Peace and Development in Guatemala, who outlined some updates on the elections and laid out potential outcomes if each of the candidates were to win.

This newsletter also contains more updates on the election and the continued attempts by the Guatemalan government to undermine the legitimacy of the elections, as well as some recent polling numbers which show Arévalo with a healthy lead over rival Sandra Torres.

As the election inches closer, it is pivotal for us to remain informed and hold everyone involved accountable so please take the time to get informed and for more updates check out our website here.



Raúl Molina Mejía is co-founder and secretary general for political affairs of the Network for Peace and Development in Guatemala, a global alliance of Guatemalans working from exile for peace and justice in Guatemala. An academic and a columnist with the Guatemalan daily newspaper La Hora, for more than a decade he was a member of the board of directors of GHRC/USA. Forced to leave Guatemala in 1980, when he was rector of the University of San Carlos, he has taught at New York University, Long Island University, and other institutions and represented the Guatemalan opposition before the United Nations, as well as serving as an advisor during the negotiation of the Peace Accords. He answered our questions from his home in Santiago, Chile, where he teaches history at Alberto Hurtado University.

1. What are the immediate dangers in Guatemala in the next month and what can the international community do to allay those dangers?

The two clear dangers for the three weeks to come before the second round of elections between Bernardo Arévalo, of Movimiento Semilla, and Sandra Torres, of UNE, are—

a) disqualification of Bernardo Arévalo and/or his party Semilla by illegal and unconstitutional actions carried out by the Ministerio Público (MP, General Attorney's Office), in order to prevent his participation in the run-off election, in collusion with the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) and the Constitutional Court (CC); and

b) attempts to deny Arévalo his triumph in case he participates in the run-off election and wins the presidency, as expected. Various polls are predicting his clear win, indicated as well by the enthusiastic support of large masses of people during his campaign all over the country. A third danger, an assassination attempt, is always present, although it seems at this moment that all parties involved are trying to avoid falling into violence and causing deaths.

Contrary to our original concerns, the international community is strongly responding to those dangers. The first attempts to derail Bernardo's presence in the second round were defeated with the help of strong statements from the international community. The recount of votes ordered by the CC, which delayed confirming the candidates for the run-off election for more than a week, was duly overcome, and the request from the MP to exclude Semilla was rejected, despite strong pressures against the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), the main electoral authority. Both the debates and expressions of concern by members and the assembly of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) have been outstanding. The OAS's Secretary General is visiting Guatemala this week in order to complement the concerning reports already presented at the Permanent Council by the OAS Mission of Observers to the Elections in Guatemala and the TSE's President.

Evidently, a firm and strong statement by the Permanent Council, which might include invoking the OAS's Democratic Charter, will make a substantial contribution to allaying and mitigating the

dangers faced by pro-democracy forces in Guatemala. International solidarity can also play a significant role, with denunciations and concrete acts of support, as is already happening in many parts of the world, including demonstrations supported by GHRC in Washington, DC.

2. What are the dangers if Torres wins? Will risks to human rights defenders increase? Who in particular will be more at risk than before? Would a Torres win negatively affect defenders of the environment in the countryside? How would it affect other sectors, such as the judicial sector, university sector, etc.?

Given the present conditions, Torres can only win by fraud or totally stealing the elections. Such an event, as well as a military coup d'état, which is also possible, would set Guatemala into a political explosion of unforeseeable consequences. A presidency by Torres would give continuity to the rampant abuses, corruption, and impunity that have pervaded the country under Jimmy Morales and Alejandro Giammattei. Torres would be more of the same, and worse. Most sectors in Guatemala have been taken over by mafia-like groups that rule today, including the judicial sector, the national university, and the Human Rights Procurator's Office. Torres bears responsibility for the deterioration of democratic institutions because she has maintained an alliance with President Giammattei in all areas where UNE, her political party, participates. That unbearable situation would be consolidated and intensified: a "dictatorship of corruption" for years to come.

3. What are the dangers if Arévalo wins? What would the effect of an Arévalo win be on human rights defenders and others in the next few months, before he takes office? Would there be retaliation? Who would likely be targeted? Who is most vulnerable?

If Arévalo wins on August 20th, the country would face six months of uncertainty and instability, despite the great enthusiasm and positive energy coming from large masses of the population. The state structures that protect corruption and impunity, such as the MP and the courts, will bring up all sorts of obstacles before the inauguration of Bernardo Arévalo as president on January 14th, 2024. Legal actions against Semilla and constant disinformation about the president-elect will increase and intensify. Military intervention or Trump-style post-electoral violence will be a permanent threat.

Those groups in power today will try to maintain their strategy of persecution against "opposition figures" and defenders of human rights, democracy, and justice as long as possible. Control of state institutions will be deeper, and legal actions will be taken against sectors of society that have joined different forms of resistance to the regime. Most likely, retaliation will exist against those who supported the change, as well as those who actively participated with Semilla.

4. What are some things the international community can do to support democracy and human rights in Guatemala?

Constant accompaniment is a must for a significant period of time. It is not enough to pay attention to events up to August 20th. The weeks immediately after the vote will be crucial, until confirmation of the results, as well as the months until the inauguration of the new government. Once Bernardo Arévalo is in office, he will be in charge of presenting concrete requests for the international community to support democracy and human rights in Guatemala. Full cooperation of the international community and international solidarity with civil society will be a very significant component of the most effective plan of recovery for the Guatemalan State.



Public Ministry Asks TSE for Names of People Who Entered Vote Counts into System

The Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI) on July 31 asked the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) to reveal the names of the people who entered into the computerized system the handwritten vote tallies during the first round of elections in each municipality and department. The Feci also asked for a certified copy of the results of various elections, both for local and departmental offices, as well as congressional offices, Central American Parliament positions, and the presidency. The Feci alleged that it had received reports that some of the information was falsified or altered when it was entered into the computerized system.

The TSE responded that it was concerned about the request. The majority of the people who did this work at the polls were young, TSE president Irma Palencia said and only worked at the polls for a few days. They scanned the information into the system, so it would have been impossible to alter it, she noted. The request was sent by prosecutor Leonor Eugenia Morales Lazo. The TSE was given five days to comply with the request.

Guatemala presidential hopeful Arévalo seen winning presidential runoff poll with 63% of the vote

With the second round of elections only three weeks away, a new poll reported by Reuters shows Arévalo with a strong lead over rival Sandra Torres. According to a survey of 1,272 people, Arévalo is polling at 63 percent, compared to 37 percent for Torres. Arévalo surprised many when he, a staunch anti-graft candidate, took a strong second-place finish behind Torres during the first round of elections on June 25th, and he has continued to surpass expectations by polling so high. Arévalo has had to endure numerous attempts by the Guatemalan government to obstruct his candidacy and potential election.

With his poll numbers so high, and amidst such intense opposition by the current government to his potential victory, it remains to be seen what types of attacks those opposing him may resort to in order to prevent an Arévalo victory.

Please help us monitor the situation in Guatemala and support human rights. Donate if you are able. Any amount helps.

Thank you for standing by the Guatemalan people as they fight for their democracy.