

GHRC Denounces Closure of Peace Archives Directorate in Guatemala

The Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA expresses extreme concern at the Guatemalan Government's announcement that it is closing down the Peace Archives Directorate of the Peace Secretariat (SEPAZ) and dissolving its investigative team, effectively canceling their projects to publish historical reports and denying future contributions to criminal investigations.

The work of the Peace Archives Directorate (*Dirección de los Archivos de la Paz*, DAP) has been integral to ongoing efforts to institutionalize the peace process and promote transitional justice, and has contributed greatly to the public's access to truth and historic memory.

The Directorate's investigative researchers and their reports have provided key evidence for human rights prosecutions, such as the military chain of command at times when the army committed massacres, torture and forced disappearances. Recently, Archive staff were called upon to provide expert testimony in emblematic cases such as the Genocide Case brought against former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt.

Created in 2008, the Directorate's mandate is to "receive, analyze, classify, compile and digitalize military archives in order to establish human rights violations committed during the internal armed conflict", recognizing explicitly that "the clarification of historic truth has been part of the Guatemalan peace process given that it contributes to the dignification of victims" of the conflict. In 2009, the mandate was expanded to include documents from other Government offices that could help establish human rights violations.

In only four years, the office has digitalized more than two million documents and published nine books that analyze themes such as the Presidential General Staff (*Estado Mayor Presidencial*, or EMP), illegal adoptions, the Military Diary (*el Diario Militar*), and the labor rights movement.

Nevertheless, the Secretary of Peace, Antonio Arenales Forno, announced on May 31 that the investigation and analysis provided by the archive is not reason to maintain the entity, saying: "Today the decision was made to eliminate the Directorate, canceling contracts for which I find no justification and the functioning of an office I find makes no sense." The focus of the Peace Archives, he maintained, should be on providing information for the National Reparations Program, not on investigating the military, an erroneous justification given that the dignification of victims through the clarification of the truth is considered an important element of reparations.

Since January, when retired General Pérez Molina assumed the presidency, 23 staff members of the Directorate have been dismissed, including the former director Marco Tulio Alvarez. In April, five technical archival experts were let go, and on May 28, 17 investigators and other experts were notified that their contracts had been prematurely terminated. Members of the SEPAZ union, SITRASEPAZ, have denounced the firings as illegal under existing procedural guidelines.

The closure will also terminate an existing agreement of cooperation between the Peace Archives and the Public Prosecutor's Office and will impede the Archive's contribution to criminal investigations into human rights violations. Furthermore, the comments of Arenales Forno demonstrate not only a lack of respect for victims of the internal armed conflict, but a genuine threat to their right to truth and justice.

By dismantling the entity designed to oversee and manage the entirety of documents pertaining to human rights violations committed during the internal armed conflict, Secretary Arenales Forno and President Pérez Molina will extinguish an invaluable contribution to the preservation of historic memory and to the State's



obligations under the Peace Accords, at the same time obstructing efforts to investigate the military for egregious human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

The Guatemala Human Rights Commission calls on the Guatemalan government to:

- Strengthen, not weaken, the Peace Archives Directorate and respect its important role in promoting transitional justice;
- Reestablish formal collaboration and inter-governmental agreements that were terminated between the Directorate and the Public Prosecutor's Office;
- Reinstate any worker whose contract has been illegally terminated;
- Explain the fate of the digital archives maintained by the Directorate and the public reading room;
- Clarify and make transparent the plans to restructure SEPAZ, the National Reparations Program (PNR) and the Presidential Human Rights Commission (COPREDEH).

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

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