



GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION/USA

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Guatemala Human Rights Update

December 2025–January 2026

Governance and International Relations

Arévalo Institutes State of Siege

On January 18, Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo called for a state of emergency in Guatemala following a series of police killings carried out by gang members. The specific state of emergency he has implemented, called a state of siege, implies the suspension of certain constitutional rights. Arévalo declared the state of siege the same day more than a dozen National Civil Police officers in Guatemala City were shot by gang members in a series of coordinated attacks. Nine police officers died from their wounds and eight others were injured.

The shootings followed the quelling of coordinated riots by gang members in three separate prisons on January 18. The gang members were protesting the transfer of leaders to other prisons and advocating for other privileges. Inmates took dozens of prison staff hostage. Police forces managed to free the hostages. In apparent retaliation, jailed gang members tasked gang members outside the walls of the prison with carrying out the murders of police officers. The Guatemalan Congress on January 19 approved the state of siege for 30 days, and to be applied nationwide. Under the state of siege, the military and police are allowed to arrest suspects without a warrant. During the state of siege Guatemalans will [maintain](#) some rights that were suspended under such states in prior administrations. Nonetheless, the suspension of basic guarantees puts the general population at significant risk, especially vulnerable sectors, such as social and Indigenous leaders and others who comprise groups that have been falsely accused of crimes. See our [Urgent Action](#) for more context and to take action.

Critics of Attorney General Consuelo Porras, who has been sanctioned for corruption by 43 countries, question the office's handling of one of the first cases against a suspect arrested in connection with the police murders. Instead of charging him with murder or terrorism, the Public Prosecutor's Office [charged](#) him with illegal possession of a weapon and drug-related offenses. The Attorney General is [suspected](#) of being linked to criminal and corrupt sectors that are attempting to destabilize Arevalo's government, and the prison riots and police murders are seen as part of this effort.

EU Extends Targeted Sanctions

The Council of the European Union has [extended](#) until January 13, 2027 the sanctions it has placed on eight Guatemalans who have undermined democracy and the rule of law. Currently, these EU restrictive measures apply to eight individuals and one entity. The listed individuals are subject to travel restrictions and an asset freeze, and EU citizens and companies are forbidden from making funds available to them both directly and indirectly. Those designated include the Foundation against Terrorism, its president Ricardo Rafael Méndez Ruiz Valdes, and its legal representative Raúl Amílcar Falla Ovalle, for actions that undermine the rule of law in Guatemala, consisting in persecution and intimidation of representatives of the media and of lawyers, judges and prosecutors. The Council has also imposed restrictive measures on the first instance criminal judge of the Tenth Court in Guatemala, Jimi Rodolfo Bremer Ramírez, for actions undermining democracy and the rule of law in Guatemala, such as persecution and intimidation of representatives of the media, and of lawyers and prosecutors. Others sanctioned [include](#) Attorney General Consuelo Porras; Public Ministry Secretary General Ángel Arnoldo Pineda Ávila; Head of the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity José Rafael Curruchiche Cucul; Prosecutor at the Special Prosecution Office Against Impunity Leonor Eugenia Morales Lazo de Sánchez; and Judge Fredy Raúl Orellana Letona. EU sanctions were first imposed in February 2024 in response to efforts to block President-elect Bernardo Arévalo from assuming office, with Porras being one of the first individuals sanctioned for obstructing a democratic transition of power.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

Maya Q'eqchi' Land Defender Murdered

On December 14, Víctor Manuel Colindres, a land defender who opposed mining operations by Río Niquel, was shot to death by unidentified men in a grocery store in Colindres, in the Sierra Santa Cruz. Colindres had actively participated in protests against the mine from January to June, 2025. During those protests, 54 communities demanded that the government revoke 10 environmental licenses granted to the Río Nickel S.A., a subsidiary of the Canadian company Central American Nickel (CAN), and Producciones del Atlántico, a Guatemalan company. They argued that the companies' operations threatened the biodiversity of the Sierra Santa Cruz located in Livingston and El Estor, Izabal, as well as their water sources. The licenses, which had been granted under the administration of Alejandro Giammattei, were [revoked](#) last summer. See coverage by Rights Action [here](#). Another protester, Misael Mata, from the community of Las Flores, was murdered last May.

Fourth Indigenous Leader Arrested in Relation to Protests

On January 14, Indigenous leader Basilio Puac García, former vice president of the 48 Cantons of Totonicapán. Puac, was arrested and falsely charged with crimes. He is the fourth Indigenous leader arrested since last April for helping to organize protests that foiled a coup attempt in 2023, after Arévalo's surprise victory at the polls. Puac, like Indigenous leaders Esteban Toc Tzay, Hector Chaclan, and Luis Pacheco, is facing charges related to his role in the peaceful protests. On January 15, [President Arévalo](#) publicly denounced the arrest as an unfounded attack on democracy and Indigenous peoples. The Board of Directors of the 48 Cantones condemned Puac García's arrest as political retaliation and called for his immediate release in [an official statement](#), specifying that such actions seek to intimidate Indigenous authorities.

On January 16, Puac was [released](#) from jail on bail, approximately 48 after arrest. Judge Víctor Funes dismissed an initial charge of terrorism, but indicted García on charges of [sedition, obstruction of justice, and illicit association](#). Puac must report to the Public Ministries Office in Guatemala City once a month to sign the attendance register and satisfy bail conditions. Chaclan and Pacheco, meanwhile, have been in pretrial detention for more than ten months, and a recent suspension of their legal proceedings, owing to the so-called Foundation Against Terrorism's motion to [recuse](#) the judge assigned to their case, means they may be detained for at least for more months.

Guatemalan analysts [view](#) Puac's arrest, as well as the arrests of Toc Tzay, Chaclan, and Pacheco, as a tactic to exact revenge on the sector that led the fight for democracy. During the 2023 protests, Indigenous leaders called for Attorney General Consuelo Porras' resignation, since she was leading the charge to prevent Arévalo from assuming office. Her efforts included the theft and retention of ballot boxes.

On January 20, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism [Ben Saul](#) submitted an [Amicus Curiae](#) brief asking Guatemala's courts to review the country's use anti-terrorism laws. The UN rapporteur issued the brief in response to a case brought by [the 48 Cantones de Totonicapán](#), which challenges the constitutionality of these laws. In particular, the brief reportedly emphasizes that the [right to protest](#) should not be criminalized under anti-terrorism legislation, warning against its use to suppress social and political dissent.

Maya Q'eqchi' Community Evicted in Izabal

El Estor, Izabal remains a focal point of land disputes linked to palm oil expansion projects. On December 17, 2025, [state security forces](#) destroyed homes and [forcibly evicted](#) more than 40 families from their ancestral land in La Ceiba. The families remain displaced. [State representatives and alleged landowners](#) Rina Castañeda, Isabel Bautista, and Imelda Bautista were present during the eviction and said it was carried out in compliance with the judicial order.

On December 18, 2025, the Authorities of the Indigenous Municipality of Santa Lucía Utatlán released [a public statement](#) condemning the evictions as human rights violations. According to the statement, the community has become an “[object of territorial and forced dispossession](#),” calling on both Congress and President Bernardo Arévalo to stop the systemic violence and displacement of the Maya Q'eqchi'. Particularly, the statement references Guatemala’s obligation to abide by [Convention 169](#) of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which protects Indigenous peoples’ collective territorial rights.

Secondary Elections

Various important selection processes are now underway in Guatemala, including the election of judges for the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which will oversee the 2027 general elections, and the selection of judges for the Constitutional Court. Procedures will also soon begin for the selection of a new attorney general. These [processes](#), known as “secondary elections,” are coinciding this year, for the first time in more than a decade, raising tension levels in Guatemala as corrupt networks seek to hold on to their privileges and impunity and advocates of transparency and human rights seek to renew and reform corrupt institutions.

Selection of CC Judges Could be Delayed

The election of Constitutional Court (CC) judges may be delayed because of legal challenges to the composition of the Superior University Council (CSU), which is responsible for appointing one of the five judges and one of the five alternate judges that will make up the new court. The Panel of Independent Experts of Guatemala (PEI-GT) on January 26 noted that there are serious irregularities in the composition of the Superior University Council; people whose terms have expired remain on the council, and newly elected members have not been seated. Blocking the taking of office of legitimately elected representatives weakens and violates internal university norms, the panel said. Any decision such a panel adopts, including the designation of Constitutional Court magistrates, is therefore illegitimate and an attack on democracy and runs the risk of being nullified. The Special Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) for the Strengthening of Democratic Institutions in Guatemala also [expressed concern](#) about the composition of the CSU and the failure to seat new members, as did a number of human rights [organizations](#), including GHRC. Four requests for injunctions have been filed to halt the selection process until the new members of the council are seated. According to the various requests for injunctions, at least 23 members of the CSU have expired terms. If a provisional injunction is granted, the election process will likely be delayed. Applications are supposed to be received on February 5 and 6, and the election is scheduled for February 16.

Judges for the Constitutional Court are selected by [five governmental authorities](#): the President of the Republic, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Congress of the Republic, the Superior University Council, and the Guatemalan Bar and Notaries Association (known as the CANG).

Each authority appoints one full-time and one alternate judge. The selection process must finish before March 14, 2026. The newly elected judges will assume office on April 14, serving for a five-year term until 2031.

- ***Nominating Committee for Supreme Electoral Tribunal Sworn In***

On January 19, the [Congress of the Republic](#) swore in the Nominating Committee for the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), the country's highest judicial authority that certifies election results. As of January 29, the Nominating Committee had received applications from 181 legal professionals vying for spots on the tribunal. [Within approximately 30 days](#), the Nominating Committee is expected to send its final candidate list to the Guatemalan Congress, which will then elect five primary and five alternate magistrates. The elections must take place before March 19, when the incumbent judges' terms expire. The [elected TSE judges](#) will be sworn in on March 20 and will serve until 2032, presiding over both the 2027 and 2031 presidential elections.

In recent years, the TSE has faced pressure from the Office of the Attorney General, headed by María Consuelo Porras, and from the Constitutional Court to invalidate election results following [the election of President Bernardo Arévalo](#) in 2023. The 2026 selection process will be fundamental in preserving the TSE's judicial independence and its capacity to guarantee fair elections.

OAS Concerned about Lack of Interviews for TSE Candidates

The Special Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) for the Strengthening of Democratic Institutions in Guatemala has expressed concern that no interviews with the candidates for the TSE magistracies are planned. In a January 27 press release, the Special Mission [wrote](#), "The Mission recalls that the applicable regulatory framework establishes that, within a period of thirty (30) days from the date of its installation, the Nominating Committee must carry out its functions, and that its sessions must be public. In this context, and considering that the schedule itself provides for the submission of the shortlist to the Congress of the Republic on February 16, within the legally established deadlines, the Mission considers that there is sufficient margin to incorporate public and standardized interviews as an integral part of a more robust, comprehensive public evaluation. The Mission urges the Nominating Committee to reconsider the exclusion of interviews and to schedule them under clear, objective, useful, and equitable rules. In the Mission's view, interviews are an appropriate practice for strengthening transparency and the public nature of the process, through open hearings that are recorded and, if possible, broadcast; equity and equality of opportunity, by guaranteeing uniform conditions for all candidates; and accountability and social oversight, by allowing the public and observers to directly learn about the criteria, backgrounds, and democratic commitments of those aspiring to lead the electoral authority."

Case Updates

- ***Diario Militar: Judge Rejects Dismissal of Edgar Hernández Méndez Case***

On January 7, [Judge Carol Berganza](#) formally rejected the the Public Prosecutor's Office's request to dismiss the case against retired colonel Edgar Hernández Méndez, the former commander of Military Zone Number 21, who is charged with rape and crimes against humanity. Proceedings against Hernández Méndez were [suspended](#) in late December because the Supreme Court failed to assign a judge to the proceedings. Hernández Méndez is charged crimes against humanity and the rape of Candelaria Pop Coy in 1984.

Judge Berganza criticized the Public Prosecutor's Office's for handling of the case, noting that prosecutors never contacted Pop Coy to confirm her testimony, failed to analyze the evidence used to issue Hernández Méndez's arrest warrant, and did not take any investigative steps within the legally allotted three-month period. A hearing is scheduled for February 10 to determine whether Hernández Méndez will face trial.

[The Diario Militar cases](#) exhibit crucial human rights accountability and transitional justice efforts for victims and survivors of Guatemala's internal armed conflict. The cases stem from a secret military document, the *Diario Militar* ([Death Squad Dossier](#)), that was discovered and smuggled out of Guatemalan military intelligence files in 1999. The dossier lists the fates of 183 people forcibly disappeared by Guatemalan security forces from 1983 and 1985. [Military Zone 21](#), located in Cobán, Alta Verapaz, was a military base where torture and extrajudicial executions were carried out during the late 1970s and 1980s. Forensic exhumations at the base have uncovered more than 550 sets of human remains buried in unmarked graves. The majority of the victims were Indigenous Q'eqchi' civilians.

- ***Claudia González Freed from Restrictions***

On January 21, a court lifted all restrictive measures on [Claudia González](#), a former representative of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). González is now permitted to travel freely, both nationally and internationally, while judicial proceedings continue. The [case](#) is scheduled to resume with a hearing on May 5. On August 28, 2023, González was [arrested](#) on charges of [abuse of authority](#) related to her work at the CICIG. She was released from detention in November 2023, but placed under house arrest. Human rights organizations have noted that her trial reflects similar patterns of “[prolonged detention, repeated procedural irregularities, and restricted access to a fair trial](#)” and the broader criminalization of lawyers and prosecutors in Guatemala under the leadership of Attorney General María Consuelo Porras.

- ***Hearing of Stuardo Campo Postponed***

On January 26, the bail hearing of former anti-corruption prosecutor Stuardo Campo was [postponed](#), continuing a pattern of delays and suspensions that has plagued this case and others brought against him and drawn [international condemnation](#). Campo has been awaiting a hearing to request conditional release since 2023. The hearing relates to a case brought against him for alleged abuse of authority in his investigation of the Santo Tomás de Castilla Free Trade Zone (known as ZOLIC). In 2024, Margaret Satterthwaite, UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, [expressed concern](#) about the charges against Campos, saying they “appear to be part of a pattern of criminalization of prosecutors and deputy prosecutors who have worked in the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office.”

- ***Aura Minerals Begins Mining Operations in Asunción Mita, Jutiapa***

On January 6, Canadian mining company [Aura Minerals](#) announced the [start](#) of its Era Dorada (“Golden Era”) Project in Asunción Mita, Jutiapa, following receipt of its construction license. The mine is expected to produce [1.75 million ounces](#) of gold over the next 17 years. Aura Minerals [acquired the project from Bluestone Resources, Inc.](#), whose authorization for open-pit mining was revoked by the Arévalo administration over concerns about water contamination, though its underground mining operations have been permitted to continue.

In September 2022, residents of Asunción Mita rejected a public consultation regarding the initial mining project. In response, the Constitutional Court temporarily suspended Articles 1, 3 and 20 of the Municipal Consultation, effectively nullifying its outcome. Community leaders and environmentalists remain concerned about the [risk of water pollution](#).

Peaceful Resistance of La Puya Wins ICSID Case

On December 23, 2025, the World Bank’s International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) [dismissed](#) a claim filed by US-based company Kappes, Cassiday, and Associates (KCA), ruling in favor of the Guatemalan government and the [Peaceful Resistance La Puya](#). The case related to the Guatemalan government’s suspension of the Progreso VII Derivada gold mining project. This suspension, confirmed in 2020 by the Constitutional Court, came in response to findings of violations of collective rights, including the absence of free, prior, and informed consultation. In addition, the project’s Environmental Impact Assessment contained irregularities and was found to lack a construction license As Peace Brigades International points out in its [reporting](#), the ICSID tribunal concluded that Guatemala ““did not violate its international obligations to protect investment, recognizing that the suspension of the project was in response to internal judicial decisions and a real social conflict, not arbitrarily caused by the State.’ The ruling establishes that a State is not obliged to compensate a company for suspending a project that has been rejected by society, that territorial defense cannot result in economic debt

for the country, and that community resistance does not justify international financial sanctions.” KCA has been ordered by the ICSID to reimburse Guatemala approximately \$380,000 in legal costs. It is estimated, however, that Guatemala incurred [USD 4.7 million](#) in legal expenses over the seven years of proceedings.

Immigration

Judge Blocks Cancellation of Humanitarian Parole

As [Reuters reports](#), a federal judge has blocked the Trump administration’s push to terminate the legal status of more than 8,400 family members of US citizens and green card holders who moved to the United States from seven Latin American countries. Boston-based US District Judge Indira Talwani issued a preliminary injunction on January 24 that prevents the Department of Homeland Security from ending the humanitarian parole granted to thousands of people from Cuba, Haiti, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. They had been allowed to move to the United States under family reunification parole programs created or modified under the Biden administration. Under the family reunification programs, US citizens or lawful permanent residents could apply to serve as sponsors for family members in those seven countries, letting them live in the US as they waited for their immigrant visas to become available. The ruling came in a class action lawsuit pursued by immigrant rights advocates challenging the administration’s rollback of temporary parole granted to hundreds of thousands of migrants.

State Department Pauses Granting of Visas

On January 21, the US State Department [paused](#) the issuing of visas to applicants from seventy-five designated countries, including Guatemala. During this pause, the State Department will conduct a full review of policies, regulations, and guidance to ensure that immigrants from high-risk countries “do not utilize welfare in the U.S. or become a public charge.” Nonimmigrant visas (e.g., H-1B, L-1, TN, and B-1/B-2) will continue to be processed and are not impacted by the directive. The State Department will continue to schedule immigrant visa interviews for nationals of the affected countries, but no immigrant visas will be issued until the policy review is complete.