



GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION/USA

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Guatemala Human Rights Update

March 2026

Election Processes

- ***USAC Rector Election Marred by Anomalies***

The Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC) is [scheduled](#) to hold its highly contested rector election on April 8, amid ongoing legal disputes, student protests, and international expressions of concern. Rodolfo Chang has been nominated by opposition groups to challenge the incumbent rector, Walter Mazariegos, for the 2026–2030 term, but anomalies have marred the process. The Superior University Council (CSU), so far has accredited only a fraction of the university electoral bodies (known as CEUs), delaying the accreditation of those that would vote against the current rector, leading critics to argue that bodies seen as aligned with incumbent rector Walter Mazariegos are being prioritized in the accreditation process. Student and opposition groups, including representatives of multiple student electoral bodies, have denounced this pattern as undemocratic and filed a request for an injunction seeking to compel full accreditation of all legitimately elected CEU members. On March 30, the Sixth Chamber of the Administrative Court definitively [suspended](#) proceedings related to that injunction, arguing that no rights were being violated.

On March 28, the OAS Observer Mission [urged](#) university authorities and the bodies responsible for the process, as well as the courts hearing the corresponding injunctions, including the Constitutional Court, “to ensure that the accreditation of electoral bodies is carried out in strict accordance with the law, through decisions that are duly substantiated, uniform, and publicly explained; guarantee that no exclusion is carried out in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner; preserve conditions of transparency, access to information, and observation; and avoid any action that could be interpreted as an artificial alteration of the will expressed in the internal elections that gave rise to said electoral bodies.” The Mission also called on the Ministry of the Interior and the National Civil Police “to adopt, within the scope of their authority and with strict respect for university autonomy, the preventive and protective measures necessary to guarantee the life, integrity, and safety of voters, as well as the candidates for rector, during the periods preceding, concurrent with, and following election day, preventing acts of intimidation, violence, or coercion that could affect the free exercise of their rights and the normal conduct of the process.”

The [G-13 Donor Group](#), a forum of international countries and multilateral organizations representing the largest donors to the development of Guatemala, on March 30 called for orderly and transparent elections, stressing the importance of upholding democratic norms within the country’s largest public university.

The European Union Observer Mission on April 1 [expressed concern](#) regarding “attempts to manipulate the process by obstructing the accreditation of the legitimately elected electoral bodies.” The Mission also observed that “a climate of fear, uncertainty, and

intimidation persists, stemming in part from the wave of criminalization and administrative harassment against students, professors, and university staff, as well as from the lack of transparency and public accountability in decision-making by university authorities.” The Mission pointed out that there had been “reports of incidents of violence that endanger the lives and safety of members of the university community, particularly those who are critical of the current authorities.”

- **CC Judges Sworn in Amid Concerns about Interference**

On March 15, the elections for magistrates of Guatemala’s Constitutional Court for the 2026–2031 term were [finalized](#), as President Bernardo Arévalo added his selection to those of the four other institutions that elect judges and alternate judges. On March 24, the Guatemalan Congress [swore in](#) the new Constitutional Court judges. They will be seated in mid-April.

Some of those [selected](#) have been cause for concern: the re-election of Roberto Molina Barreto, along with Luis Alfonso Rosales Marroquín, has been [called out](#) by survivors of the armed conflict as “a direct affront to the historic struggle of victims, survivors and social organizations that for decades have worked to clarify the truth and reach justice for the serious violations to human rights committed in the Internal Armed Conflict,” as the Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMEDGUA) puts it. The organization cited his participation in the legal defense of the accused Efraín Ríos Montt for genocide, rulings that have been alleged to favor networks of impunity within the justice system, and actions directed against independent judges investigating cases of corruption, among other concerns.

President Arévalo noted that there was external pressure to favor Molina Barreto for the magistrate position; he [announced](#) publicly that he had found out that the US embassy was asking Congress to vote for candidates without integrity, such as Molina Barreto and Consuelo Porras. During the floor debate, Congressman David Illescas [said](#) that representatives should not fear the pressure being exerted by the United States. He referred to calls made by John Barrett, Chargé d’Affaires at the US Embassy in Guatemala. For his part, the Chargé d’Affaires in a message shared on the Embassy’s social media accounts, said, “the second-degree elections are Guatemalan processes that have their own norms and rules, and we will respect these processes, but we will not tolerate interference from drug traffickers and organized crime.” Six members of Congress who spoke to [Plaza Publica](#) on condition of anonymity confirmed the calls.

- **Porras Garners 33 Objections in Third Term Bid**

As the selection process for Guatemala’s next attorney general continues, “tachas” (formal objections) have been lodged against several candidates by civil society groups, journalists, and human rights organizations, citing issues such as alleged conflicts of interest and past involvement in corrupt prosecutions. On March 13, the Nominating Committee for Attorney General in Guatemala [finished](#) its review of objections against candidates for the position. Among these, 33 objections were [filed](#) against the current Attorney General Consuelo Porras, who is seeking a third term. Despite the breadth and gravity of these objections, the committee largely favored her candidacy, accepting only five of the challenges. Of the objections that were accepted, the issues cited include facilitating impunity in cases of corruption, deliberate weakening of criminal investigations, accusations of thesis plagiarism, the reduction of the Public Ministry’s operational capacity, malicious litigation [against justice officials](#), university students, and others, lack of [access to public information](#), international [sanctions](#) against her, and [selective criminal prosecution](#),

as well as doubts regarding her suitability due to her reported [involvement in illegal adoptions](#). Because the majority of objections were dismissed, the full list of 33 objections will not be made public when the committee releases its official shortlist of candidates. In addition to Porras, 17 of the remaining 49 candidates for Attorney General faced objections. However, only six were required to present their defenses before the committee.

On April 17, the nominating committee will submit a shortlist of six candidates to President Bernardo Arévalo. He will then have one month to select a candidate. The new attorney general will [assume office](#) by May 17.

Human Rights Violations

- ***Thirty Families Evicted in Flores, Petén***

On March 25, 2026, riot police [carried out](#) a forced eviction of approximately 30 families from the community of Las Viñas in Flores, Petén. The operation was ordered by the Public Prosecutor's Office, under the leadership of Attorney General María Consuelo Porras. During the eviction, tear gas was used against residents, including women, children, and elderly individuals, and several injuries were reported.

According to community members, the eviction was conducted despite efforts to engage in dialogue and without adequate safeguards to protect affected residents. Security forces reportedly blocked access to the community early in the morning and gave families only a short time to vacate before using force. One resident described the eviction: "...[W]e saw a large number of patrol cars and police officers already stationed on the community road. We gathered the courage to speak with them, but they used force without regard for the fact that we are women."

The families report that they have lived on the land for more than 40 years and claim historical rights to the territory, linked in part to displacement during Guatemala's internal armed conflict. Government officials have argued that the land is in a protected area, while private individuals associated with a real estate company known as Las Lucía Marías, Inc., [reportedly](#) from the Rios Sandoval and Rios Figueroa family group, claim to own the land themselves. On January 22, the community faced a prior eviction attempt, during which a helicopter reportedly flew over the area and private individuals fired shots into the air.

- ***Arrest Warrants Issued for Indigenous Leaders***

On March 12, Indigenous authorities in Santiago Atitlán confirmed that a judge had [ordered](#) arrest warrants for them in January. The warrants are for four ancestral authorities of the Tz'utujil people, Juan Mendoza Damian, Pedro Chiquival Mendoza, Miguel Pablo Sicay, and Diego Petzey Quiejú, notary. These community leaders are accused of crimes including sedition, incitement, and coercion. The leaders criminalized had been involved in anti-corruption efforts at the municipal level. The issuance of arrest warrants, combined with the lack of transparency surrounding the case, has generated fear in Santiago Atitlán, where authorities have reportedly kept investigations confidential and communities have struggled to access information about the proceedings. These developments continue a pattern of criminalization of Indigenous authorities and community

leaders, particularly those involved in the defense of transparency, democracy, and human rights.

Case Updates

- ***Persecution of Nanci Sinto Continues***

On March 17, Judge Marjorie René Azpuru Villela, a magistrate of Guatemala's Fifth Criminal Court, renewed the judicial persecution against human rights defender Nanci Sinto. Judge Azpuru Villela [scheduled](#) for April 13 a hearing in the case. Sinto, an Indigenous human rights defender, faces charges of "depredation of cultural property," allegedly related to her participation in a [protest](#) against former President Alejandro Giammattei's administration on November 21, 2020. The protest was marked by intense police repression. During the protest, Sinto was [attacked](#) by riot police, who [beat](#) her with their shields.

The renewed persecution came shortly after Sinto [filed](#) an objection (tacha) to the nomination of Attorney General Consuelo Porras for a third term. Sinto argued that Porras' administration of the Public Ministry had caused a "[significant deterioration in the institutional capacity to investigate and prosecute complex crimes](#)." Sinto's objection was ultimately rejected.

The legal proceedings against Sinto have been marked by multiple [irregularities](#). On March 31, 2023, Judge Sonia Carol Martínez Obregón rejected 20 of 21 pieces of evidence submitted by Sinto's defense, while accepting 55 of 56 pieces of evidence presented by the Public Prosecutor's Office in support of the charges. During the hearings, media representatives were forced to leave the courtroom. A recusal was filed in response but was rejected.

In June 2023, Judge Wendy Coloma attempted to [close](#) the proceedings against Sinto; however, the Public Prosecutor's Office appealed before the Third Chamber of the Criminal Branch Against Drug Trafficking and Crimes Against the Environment, which reactivated the case.

- ***Former Prosecutor Stuardo Campo's Hearing Rescheduled***

On March 10, Judge Jimmi Bremer [rescheduled](#) a hearing in the case of former prosecutor Stuardo Campo. The hearing related to the Libramiento de Chimaltenango corruption investigation headed by Campo when he was director of the Prosecutor's Office Against Corruption. The case involved fraud related to the construction of a highway, which those involved recently [admitted to committing](#). The charges against Campo relate to supposed irregularities that took place during his investigation.

This case, and other spurious cases brought against Campo, have been plagued by repeated delays which have kept the former prosecutor in pretrial detention for three years.

In a separate case against Campo, known as the Zolic case, the Tenth Criminal Court began a preliminary hearing on Thursday, February 26 after many delays. During the proceedings, Judge Víctor Cruz moved forward with the intermediate phase of the trial, without determining whether Campo should remain in pretrial detention or be granted

house arrest. Cruz has been [sanctioned](#) by the United States for corruption.

Campo was [acquitted](#) on July 25, 2025, in a third case, known as the Alfa Siete case, alongside two other former prosecutors. In response to Campo's ongoing detention, GHRC, together with the International League Against Arbitrary Detention ILAAD, [filed a complaint](#) on his behalf before the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, [Margaret Satterthwaite](#), has spoken out about Stuardo Campo's treatment. "In July 2024," she wrote on X, "I expressed my concerns to the Guatemalan authorities about the case of Mr. Campo and what appears to be a pattern of criminalization against prosecutors who worked with FECI [Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity] and FCC [the Prosecutor's Office Against Corruption]. These actions may constitute retaliation for their investigations into corruption, undermining judicial independence and the rule of law." In an earlier communication, in respect to a judge's refusal to grant Campo house arrest, Satterthwaite [declared](#) that Guatemalan officials had been unable to substantiate their argument that, if released, Campo could influence the case against him.

Other Information

- ***Report Exposes Porras' Role in Evictions***

On March 11, six human rights organizations [published](#) the [report](#) "Dispossession and Criminalization of Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala: The Role of the Public Prosecutor's Office." The report [highlights](#) the impact of Consuelo Porras's administration as attorney general, particularly its support for land claims by private companies, which has led to hundreds of forced evictions. According to the report, the number of eviction requests has steadily increased: "From April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023, 25 evictions were requested; from April 1, 2023, to April 1, 2024, there were 94; and by March 31, 2025, 154 requests had been submitted." The report also emphasizes that these evictions have been "characterized by the use of criminal justice as the primary mechanism."

The report was written by the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, Due Process of Law Foundation, the Indigenous Peoples Law Firm, *Prensa Comunitaria*, Protection International Mesoamérica, and the Central American Institute of Political Studies (INECEP).

Among other recommendations, the report urges the international community to maintain and strengthen mechanisms for monitoring, accompanying, and providing institutional support to state and civil society entities dedicated to the protection of the territorial rights of Indigenous peoples; and incorporate agrarian conflict, the criminalization of Indigenous communities, and the erosion of judicial independence as priority issues in political dialogue and cooperation programs in Guatemala, promoting sustainable, human rights-based institutional reforms. To the nomination commission for the selection of candidates for Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the organizations recommended incorporating, as a relevant criterion in the evaluation of the work plans submitted to the committee, a clear and explicit definition of the role the Public Prosecutor's Office will assume in territorial conflicts involving indigenous peoples and rural communities.

- ***Peaceful Resistance of La Puya Celebrated***

On March 2, the Peaceful Resistance of La Puya celebrated its long and courageous [struggle](#) against extractive projects that [threaten](#) their land and livelihoods. This year marked the 14th anniversary of the movement, which began on March 2, 2012, when residents from San Pedro Ayampuc and San José del Golfo established a permanent protest camp and blockade at the entrance to a mining project site. The movement emerged in response to the gold-mining company Kappes, Cassiday & Associates, which later filed a \$499 million lawsuit against the Guatemalan government after its project was suspended due to environmental and social concerns. In a significant legal victory for Guatemala, the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes ruled in December 2025 in favor of the government, rejecting the company's claim.

The commemoration celebrated La Puya's continued [peaceful resistance](#), despite facing numerous challenges, including forced evictions, harassment, and consistent criminalization.

- ***Zamora's Request to Cancel FCT Rejected***

On March 30, 2026, Guatemala's Registry of Legal Entities [rejected](#) a request filed by journalist José Rubén Zamora to cancel the legal status of the Foundation Against Terrorism (FCT). The Registry [determined](#) that the request fell outside its jurisdiction and was based on legal provisions that do not apply to the organization.

Zamora argued that the FCT has been used as a mechanism to target and prosecute journalists, community leaders, and justice officials in Guatemala. The organization has engaged in strategic litigation and filed criminal complaints that harm journalists and their families, he noted, describing those actions as a form of systemic violence.

The FCT was founded in 2013 by Ricardo Méndez Ruiz, aimed in part at securing impunity for former military officers accused of grave human rights abuses, including his father. The FCT often acts in coordination with the Public Prosecutor's Office to advance cases that lack sufficient legal and factual basis and serve as a means to harass, intimidate, or jail opponents of corrupt networks in Guatemala. Headed by Méndez Ruiz, the FCT is a co-plaintiff in numerous spurious criminal cases against prosecutors, human right defenders, and journalists, including proceedings against Zamora himself. The FCT is also a co-plaintiff in [politically motivated cases](#) against President Bernardo Arévalo. Méndez Ruiz and FCT attorney Raúl Falla Ovalle [have been sanctioned](#) by the European Union for undermining the rule of law in Guatemala, "consisting in persecution and intimidation of representatives of the media, and of lawyers, judges and prosecutors." They were also [included](#) on the United States' Engel List of corrupt actors for "attempting to delay or obstruct criminal proceedings against former military officials."

In its decision, the Registry emphasized that the cancellation of a legal entity is an exceptional measure requiring clearly established legal grounds. It further noted that the FCT is registered under the Civil Code rather than as a non-governmental organization, meaning that the NGO law cited by Zamora cannot be applied retroactively to justify its dissolution. The Registry also stated that it does not have the authority to assess alleged abuses within criminal proceedings, indicating that such claims must be addressed through judicial channels. Zamora has announced that he will continue pursuing legal action. His request comes shortly after his release to house arrest, following more than three years in pretrial detention.

- **Global Witness Reveals Networks Harassing Defenders**

Networks of powerful elites in Guatemala are using social media platforms to orchestrate coordinated online smear campaigns against anti-corruption activists, environmental defenders and Indigenous leaders, Global Witness has revealed in a new [report](#). The report, entitled “Weaponising social media: How Indigenous leaders and climate activists are smeared and criminalised in Guatemala,” maps the powerful networks of political and economic interests behind many of the attacks.

Among the anonymous accounts that have targeted Indigenous leaders and land activists is [Yes, Master!](#) – which [appears to have various](#) incarnations, all using the imagery of [Star Wars villain Darth Vader](#), according to the report. As the report notes, the EU mission’s [final report](#) on the 2023 elections found that Yes, Master! acts as a “mother account,” generating content then shared and amplified by a network of accounts around it. An [analysis](#) by the [Centro Latinoamericano de Investigación Periodística](#) highlighted consistent interactions between Yes, Master!, another anonymous account named EriolGt, Raul Mendez Ruiz, and Raul Falla, the FCT’s lawyer, in propagating this content. Various investigations have shown that Yes, Master! repeatedly [pre-empts arrests](#) by sharing confidential information from the Public Prosecutor’s Office, led by Attorney General Consuelo Porras, indicating deliberate coordination between criminalization from the Prosecutor’s Office and smear campaigns orchestrated by social media accounts. Such coordination was also apparent in the case of detained Indigenous leader Luis Pacheco. A few hours before his arrest, Yes, Master! posted: [“Today will be a great day.”](#) Just an hour earlier, Angel Pineda, from the Prosecutor’s Office, posted the [exact same phrase](#) on his X account.

According to Global Witness, “Together, this network of fake news sites, anonymous profiles and real people has collaborated to smear Indigenous leaders and land activists. Criminal accusations filed by the FCT are supported by coordinated disinformation campaigns on social media. Such attacks work to isolate activists from their communities and pave the way for their criminalisation.”

Other disinformation sources investigated by Global Witness include XelaNews, [owned by Gustavo Cardenas](#), a communications specialist who worked closely with former President Jimmy Morales; *Republica*, a digital newspaper founded and directed by the entrepreneur Rodrigo Arenas, who has been linked to [two corruption cases](#) in Guatemala; [G7 Canal](#), [operated](#) by [Mario Delgado](#), who reportedly is a notary for Congressman Allan Rodriguez, who has been [sanctioned by the US for corruption](#); and the national broadcaster [TVGT](#), owned by Iván Andrés, who insists it is run voluntarily and has refused to disclose its funding.

According to Global Witness, social media companies such as Meta, X and TikTok are not preventing the weaponization of their platforms to harass, intimidate, and silence human rights defenders. Their failure to moderate online hate, combined with their engagement-seeking algorithms, is putting defenders in Guatemala in danger.

- **IACHR Calls for Greater Protection of Journalists**

On March 13, the report “Hate Speech in the American Convention on Human Rights: Scope of Article 13.5 and Recommendations” was [presented](#) at the 195th Session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), hosted in Guatemala. Pedro Vaca, the IACHR Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, highlighted the importance of freedom of expression and press freedom in Guatemala, where [attacks](#) on

journalists are [frequent](#).

“One thing I see in Guatemala,” Vaca [told](#) *Prensa Comunitaria*, is that, despite the fragility of press freedoms, the state of journalism—and community journalism in particular—is impressive. In other words, it is a country that is making significant efforts in journalism despite the fragility of the safeguards, and what that leads me to conclude is that this is a country that has an invaluable opportunity to provide real safeguards for that press, because the human capital that wants to practice journalism—and that, with great effort, will practice journalism—is right there. There are issues regarding democratic institutions that, until they are resolved, will hang like a sword of Damocles over the Guatemalan press. It is one of the countries where it is truly surprising how many people—or journalists—have criminal cases pending against them or fear they might, and the fact of losing confidence and assuming that their work might be targeted ultimately impacts their internal and personal confidence that they are engaged in an activity that will not be persecuted.”

Pedro Vaca recommended that the [protection mechanism](#) for journalists should be a priority. “Time is passing, and every day that goes by without a fully functioning protection mechanism,” he said, “is another second in which a journalist at risk could be attacked or face a fatal outcome.”

- ***Bard College Launches Archive to Preserve Reports***

Bard College, together with PEN America, has launched the Central America Independent Media Archive (CAIMA), an initiative to safeguard and preserve independent journalism in Central America through a digital archive accessible to the public. CAIMA was built in partnership with the Russian Independent Media Archive (RIMA) team and is the latest project under the umbrella of Kronika, a joint civic tech project of Bard College and PEN America which builds tools to protect endangered media against state censorship. Both media archives aim to provide journalists, researchers, and historians with secure access to uncensored primary sources from media silenced by authoritarian regimes.

Founded in response to the escalating criminalization and persecution of journalism in Central America, CAIMA’s mission, [according](#) to Bard, is to empower journalists, researchers, and civil society actors to deepen investigative work across the region. The collection currently preserves archival publications from 12 media outlets, including the complete editorial history of *El Periódico*, a Guatemalan publication internationally recognized for its decades of investigative reporting on corruption and abuse of power.

In 2022, *El Periódico*’s founder and director, José Rubén Zamora, was arbitrarily detained after the newspaper published 144 consecutive weeks of investigative reporting on corruption during the administration of former Guatemalan president Alejandro Giammattei. Following his arrest, the newsroom faced political, legal, and financial pressure, forcing nine journalists into exile. In May 2023, the publication was forced to shut down, cutting off public access to decades of investigative journalism. To protect their father’s legacy and the work of the newsroom, Zamora’s sons, Ramón and José Carlos, secured a complete digital copy of *El Periódico*’s archive, an effort that laid the groundwork for CAIMA.

“Our goal is to preserve the first draft of Central America’s history and ensure that the work of courageous journalists is never erased,” said CAIMA coordinator Ramón Zamora. “CAIMA is both a shield against censorship and a tool for journalists and researchers committed to exposing corruption and understanding how power operates across borders.”

The archive is designed to grow by continuously incorporating collections from other independent media organizations across Central America that face censorship, shutdowns, or forced exile. In a region where authoritarian practices increasingly restrict access to information, CAIMA strengthens journalism's ability to hold power accountable and supports deeper, evidence-based regional analysis. CAIMA can be accessed here: elarchivo.media/en