



GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION/USA

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Guatemala Human Rights Update

July 2026

Dear Friend,

The news from Guatemala is both good and bad this month. The Public Ministry, led by a new attorney general, has begun to reverse criminalization trends in three important cases. (Please see [Juan Francisco Sandoval's analysis](#) of the new attorney general and the new Constitutional Court, updated this week.) The Public Ministry has canceled the arrest warrants for 23 former anti-corruption prosecutors and has desisted in efforts to jail journalist Ruben Zamorat. Also on the positive side, the UN Working Group has found former prosecutor Stuardo Campo's detention to be arbitrary.

On the negative side, a court has revoked Stuardo Campo's acquittal in one of the three spurious cases against him. He has spent nearly three years in pretrial detention. Evictions of Indigenous and rural communities have increased in 2026, leading to renewed calls for a moratorium on evictions. As struggles over land rights continue, a court has hindered the consultation process for an Ixcan community affected by a hydroelectric project. Please read on for more details below.

To learn more about the challenges facing Guatemala's democracy as 2027 general elections approach, [sign up for our webinar](#) this Thursday examining the crisis at the University of San Carlos (USAC), the country's only public university and a pillar of democratic life. Our panel, featuring former Human Rights Ombudsman Jordán Rodas, former Acting USAC Rector Raul Molina Mejia, and USAC student Jennifer de la Cruz, will discuss why defending an independent and autonomous university is essential to protecting democracy and human rights in Guatemala. The conversation will include a live Q&A session. To read more on the conflict related to the rectorship of the university, read Juan Francisco Sandoval's analysis [here](#).

Case Updates

- ***MP Ends Effort to Place Zamora in Detention***

The Public Ministry (MP) and Guatemala's courts have reversed politically motivated judicial persecution in three important cases. According to press published on July 2, the Public Ministry (MP) has [withdrawn](#) an appeal aimed at sending journalist [José Rubén Zamora](#) back to prison. On June 23, the Constitutional Court had ruled on the appeal, determining that Zamora would remain under house arrest rather than face a return to prison. [Zamora](#), the founder and president of *El Periódico* newspaper, spent

more than two years behind bars awaiting trial before a judge granted him house arrest in October 2024. Prosecutors immediately appealed and won rulings that sent him back to jail in March 2025. He was released to house arrest again in February 2026 by the Ninth Criminal Sentencing Court. Before being dismissed from the Public Prosecutor's Office, FECI chief Rafael Curruchiche had filed the appeal seeking to have Zamora jailed again.

According to Andrea Bolaños Vargas, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the decision by the Public Prosecutor's Office to withdraw the appeal—along with actions Guatemala's institutions have taken in two other cases, outlined below—[reflect](#) “the proper use of criminal law, in accordance with international human rights standards, which require that justice be applied with legality and proportionality and never as an instrument of retaliation against those who defend human rights.”

- ***Court Cancels Arrest Warrants for Former Prosecutors***

The Third Appeals Chamber of the Criminal Branch ordered the [cancellation](#) of arrest warrants that had been issued in May 2025 for 23 people connected to Guatemala's justice sector, on the grounds that the Chamber had [exceeded its legal authority](#) when it issued the warrants. The warrants had been requested during former attorney general Consuelo Porras's tenure at the Public Ministry, based on arguments by then-FECI chief Rafael Curruchiche alleging fraudulent plea agreements, deleted files, and corrupt negotiations tied to the [Odebrecht](#) case. Among those facing warrants for arrest were former FECI chief Juan Francisco Sandoval, ex-CICIG commissioner Iván Velásquez, former Attorney General Thelma Aldana, and former prosecutor Siomara Sosa, all of whom led anti-corruption investigations that later became the pretext for their own criminalization.

- ***Court Dismisses Suit Against Molina Theissen Family***

Guatemala's Second Criminal Court of First Instance has [dismissed](#) a criminal complaint against the Molina Theissen family. The complaint sought to question the forced disappearance of Marco Antonio Molina Theissen, a 14-year-old abducted by Guatemalan security forces during Guatemala's internal armed conflict. The complaint was filed by lawyer Karen Marie Fisher Pivaral on behalf of retired military officers Francisco Luis Gordillo Martínez, Manuel Antonio Callejas y Callejas, and Manuel Benedicto Lucas García, all convicted in 2018 of crimes against humanity in the Molina Theissen case. Finding that final judgments had already established both the disappearance and state and individual responsibility for it, the Public Ministry concluded that the complaint lacked legal foundation. The complaint, the court said, attempted to relitigate facts already settled by firm sentences, and aimed to sow confusion, delay judicial proceedings, and revictimize Marco Antonio's family. The Molina Theissen case reached the [Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#) in 2003,

where it ultimately condemned the Guatemalan State for the enforced disappearance of Marco Antonio.

- ***UN Finds Stuardo Campo's Detention to be Arbitrary***

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that former anti-corruption prosecutor Stuardo Campo's arrest and detention constitute arbitrary detention. The Working Group has called on the Guatemalan government to release Campo, provide reparations, and investigate those responsible for his arrest. According to the Working Group, "The arrest and criminal charges against Mr. Campo Aguilar appear to be part of a pattern of criminalization of prosecutors and deputy prosecutors who have worked in the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office. The charges underlying the detention serve as a pretext to prevent the detainee from continuing his criminal prosecution efforts to uncover corruption in Guatemala."

The Working Group identified [multiple indicators of injustice and criminalization](#) in the various cases against Campo, such as the inability to justify his pretrial detention, violations of due process, failure to comply with international fair trial standards, and discrimination based on his role as an anti-corruption prosecutor.

Former anti-corruption prosecutor Stuardo Campo is facing [three criminal cases](#) characterized by serious violations of due process and fair trial guarantees. His prosecution has been marked by prolonged arbitrary pretrial detention, repeated judicial delays, the absence of complainants at hearings, and abusive litigation tactics by private actors, including the Foundation Against Terrorism. Arrested in May 2023, Campo was initially released to house arrest in August 2023, but he was detained again in December 2023. He has been in custody ever since. In response to Campo's ongoing detention, in 2025, 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.

- ***Court Overturns Campo's Acquittal in Alfa Siete Case***

On July 18, the Fourth Chamber of Appeals [overturned the acquittal](#) of Stuardo Campo and two other former prosecutors in a case known as the Alfa Siete case. In July 2025, the Tenth Criminal Court acquitted Campo and two other former prosecutors in the case, in which the Public Prosecutor's Office alleges the prosecutors kept an innocent elderly man in pretrial detention for over two months. The Court found that the error committed by the former prosecutors was administrative or disciplinary, not criminal, and said it shouldn't be resolved through the courts. In August 2025, the Public Ministry filed a special [appeal](#) contesting the acquittal, and the appeal was determined to be admissible on procedural grounds. The case now must be heard again by another court. Campo and his legal team

have challenged this ruling, arguing that it violates his right to due process.

Human Rights Violations

- ***Students Opposing Mazariegos Denied Enrollment***

On July 1, Walter Mazariegos began a new term as rector of the University of San Carlos (USAC), Guatemala's only public university, after a controversial election. According to multiple [sources](#), he abused his authority in order to limit the participation of opposition candidates in the election, ensuring his victory. Now, about 40 students who opposed Mazariegos have been [removed](#) from the university system and denied participation in the upcoming term. Second semester classes began on July 15th, but the [class registration system](#) would not allow these students to enroll. In fact, they did not even appear in the system as eligible students at all. Several students, upon requesting information regarding their enrollment, were asked to leave by security guards and were subject to unwarranted searches by agents of the National Civil Police.

The affected students are now receiving support from the opposition group USAC-DIRE and their lawyers, and the group has publicly condemned the actions of Mazariegos. Complaints against Mazariegos have been filed with the Public Ministry and the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, which the affected students hope will lead to an investigation. On July 23rd, more than 15 students filed criminal complaints with the Public Ministry over the arbitrary disappearance of their academic and administrative records, a situation that directly affects more than 30 USAC students. According to the statement issued by the student community, the deletion of their data undermines years of academic effort and jeopardizes the careers of workers and students at the public university.

Students have asked the Public Ministry to investigate crimes of abuse of power, concealment/deletion of data, and violation of the right to education. They have asked the Superior University Council to develop an immediate action plan to restore student records, and they have asked the Human Rights Procurator to accompany and oversee the case to safeguard the human rights of the academic community.

GHRC, along with various [international organizations](#), released a statement denouncing the reprisals against the students and the violation of the right to education, which is recognized in both the Constitution of Guatemala and in international human rights treaties.

- ***Evictions Increase in 2026***

According to a [report](#) published in *Diario de los Altos*, in the first few months of 2026, forced evictions, which primarily affect Indigenous and rural communities, have increased in Guatemala. Behind each eviction order lies a complex web of land concentration, disputes between communities and economic elites, and a justice system [accused](#) of serving private interests. The report details numerous evictions, starting with the eviction March 28th of about 30 families from the community of Las Viñas in Flores, Petén. The community, which has lived on the land since the 1970s, is facing a claim by a hotel company that claims to be the owner.

Between May and June 2026, a series of evictions of Q'eqchi' families took place on lands in Izabal and Alta Verapaz, prompting the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA) to file a petition for injunctive relief against the Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights to prevent the use of violence against the evicted families. These regions are at the center of the conflict over the expansion of oil palm plantations. On June 19, the Constitutional Court upheld the eviction of the Plan Grande community in the Sierra de Santa Cruz.

Apart from these, the Campesino Unity Committee (CUC) has documented six major evictions during Bernardo Arévalo's administration—three judicial and three extrajudicial—which have affected hundreds of families. President Bernardo Arévalo, who signed an Agrarian Accord in February 2024 with campesino organizations, is facing growing pressure. The Campesino Unity Committee filed a constitutional appeal against him for breach of the agreement, noting that multiple evictions have occurred during his administration and that commitments have not been fulfilled. According to CUC, the justice system is being used against the victims of historical dispossession.

Last year, during a [visit](#) to Guatemala, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing documented a rise in evictions—from 18 in 2023 to 130 in 2024—carried out with military force, at night, and without notice. [His report](#) lists the burning of homes, crops and personal possessions during evictions as a common practice, echoing the scorched-earth tactics employed by the military during Guatemala's civil war, and meeting the threshold of cruel and inhuman treatment under international law. The Special Rapporteur urged Guatemala to enact an immediate moratorium on collective evictions until legal protections are strengthened and a national dialogue on land is established. He also recommended that any public or private actor who carried out illegal evictions, including for the burning of homes or destruction of personal property, be held accountable.

On July 22, the Cleveland-based Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America, in a [letter](#) to the Guatemalan ambassador to the US, called on Guatemalan officials to fulfill the commitments of the 2024 Agrarian Agreement, including establishing a functioning permanent dialogue speech with Indigenous and campesino organizations; to respond to CUC's and CCDA's pending requests for an urgent

audience with President Arévalo, as required by Article 28 of the Constitution; to immediately halt extrajudicial evictions and ensure that any court-ordered evictions comply with international human rights standards protecting rural farming communities; and to direct relevant institutions, including the Land Fund, the Cadastral Information Registry, and the Ministry of Agriculture to take concrete steps toward resolving agrarian conflicts and regularizing land tenure rights for affected communities.

- ***Court Suspends Consultation Agreement***

The Constitutional Court in late July [suspended](#) an April 2026 agreement between the Ministry of Energy and Mines and the Ixil Maya communities affected by a hydroelectric dam in Chajul, Quiché. The agreement, known as Ministerial Agreement 145-2026, was issued to establish the procedure for consulting the Ixil Maya people regarding the [Palo Viejo](#) hydroelectric project, in accordance with court rulings related to Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization. The document established the stages of the consultation process, the participation of the institutions involved, the mechanisms for dialogue, and the methodology for carrying out the procedure. The Ministry of Energy and Mines stated that the purpose of the consultation would be to restore the violated rights of the Ixil people and to reach binding agreements on the consequences, risks, mitigation measures, redress, compensation, and sharing of benefits arising from the construction and operation of the hydroelectric project.

The Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations (CACIF) and the Guatemalan Chamber of Industry (CIG), however, filed legal challenges, arguing that the Ministry of Energy and Mines had exceeded the authority granted to it by law by regulating a procedure of this nature through a ministerial agreement.

With the provisional suspension ordered by the Constitutional Court, the agreement is rendered ineffective while the Court rules on the merits of the case. Judge Roberto Molina Barreto, explaining his ruling, said the consultation could continue, even if the agreement establishing the guidelines for it was suspended. He also asserted that the dam could continue in operation in the meantime. Consultations with Indigenous communities, he argued, should not be conceived of as a mechanism designed to obstruct economic development.

Other Information

- ***Selection Process for Comptroller Nominating Committee Takes Shape***

The process of selecting Guatemala's new Comptroller General of Accounts began on July 15th, with the unanimous election of [Miquel Cortés Bofill](#), rector of Rafael

Landívar University, as president of the committee that will nominate candidates for the position. With the 2027 general elections on the horizon, the process carries significant weight for the strength of Guatemala's democracy. The Comptroller General's Office is responsible for auditing the use of public funds and overseeing the financial management of all state institutions. It also has the authority to issue—or deny—the *finiquito*, a certificate confirming that a candidate has no outstanding financial or administrative liabilities to the State. Because the *finiquito* is a mandatory legal requirement for anyone seeking elected office, including the presidency, vice presidency, congressional seats, mayoralties, and Central American Parliament seats, the Comptroller General plays a key role in both public accountability and Guatemala's electoral process. For Cortés, who has [stressed](#) the importance of open dialogue and objectivity, depoliticizing the selection process will be the central challenge of the Committee. The Nominating Committee is responsible for evaluating applicants and submitting a shortlist of six candidates to Congress, which has the constitutional authority to elect the Comptroller General.

Led by Cortés, the [Committee](#) will bring together 26 other members: 13 deans from university departments related to accounting, auditing, and economics, and 13 representatives from related professional associations. The College of Economists, Public Accountants and Auditors and Business Administrators (CCEE) [elected](#) Wilberto Rojas and Alexander Sac as its two representatives to join the Nominating Committee. Rojas, who previously served as president of the Association of Comptroller General Professionals, won on a slate aligned with current employees of the Comptroller's office. Sac, by contrast, has never held public office and won on a slate allegedly linked to a [political alliance](#) built around Walter Mazariegos, the disputed rector of the University of San Carlos. Seeking influence over the Commission's eventual shortlist, Mazariegos is reportedly backing either the former comptroller Nora Segura or Quetzaltenango congressman Duay Martinez. On August 6, the College of Public Accountants and Auditors (CPA) will hold an election to select the remaining eleven representatives from the professional association constituency for the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee must be established by August 12, as the list of six candidates for the position must be submitted to the Congress of the Republic by September 22.

- **Trump's Pick for Ambassador Withdraws**

Juan José Rodríguez, a Cuban-American lawyer specializing in international fraud litigation, was nominated to the position of US Ambassador to Guatemala by President Donald Trump on March 9th. He appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April, where he said he would [prioritize](#) combating illegal migration, fostering economic and security cooperation, and countering Chinese influence in Latin America. On July 14, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee received a message of withdrawal of nomination from the President. Neither Rodríguez nor the Trump administration have publicly explained the reasons for the

withdrawal. Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo, asked by reporters for comment, said he had no information on the matter and therefore had no comment. Rodríguez's nomination followed the departure of former ambassador Tobin Bradley, who was subsequently replaced with chargé d'affaires John Barret. Barret was then reassigned to Venezuela, leaving the US mission to Guatemala under chargé d'affaires Jorgan Andrews, who continued to emphasize the Trump administration's America First priorities in the interim. The withdrawal of the nomination prolongs the period during which the US diplomatic mission in Guatemala will remain under the leadership of a chargé d'affaires. Given that the nomination and Senate confirmation process typically takes several months, the current staff situation at the embassy is likely to coincide with the beginning of Guatemala's 2027 [electoral cycle](#).

- ***UN Requests Declassification of Archives***

From June 22 to July 3, the [United Nations Working Group on Forced or Involuntary Disappearances](#) visited Guatemala to assess the country's progress regarding transitional justice for the victims of the forced disappearances that occurred during Guatemala's internal armed conflict. During the [official visit](#), Working Group members formally requested the declassification of military archives that would shed light on forced disappearances.

The members of the Working Group held meetings with authorities, victim organizations, and state entities. Ana Lorena Delgadillo, a representative of the UN Working Group, commented that international oversight is particularly important in the case of Guatemala, given the country's historic debts that persist in terms of the search for missing persons, investigations, sanctions, and reparations for victims. She called on the Guatemalan government to guarantee access to information, such as the military archives, and to open barracks and other military establishments where the bodies of forcibly disappeared persons could still be found.

Progress towards justice in such cases suffered setbacks under the previous administrations of Jimmy Morales and Alejandro Giammattei—especially during the administration of former attorney general Consuelo Porras, who dismantled the institutions in charge of investigating crimes committed during the armed conflict. However, under President Bernardo Arévalo, the government's posture towards justice has shifted in a positive direction. [The Humanitarian Search Mechanism for Missing Persons](#) was implemented on June 21, which aims to facilitate investigations into forced disappearances. Families of the victims consider this effort an important step towards justice but still insufficient given institutional restraints. Delgadillo [recognized](#) the creation of the mechanism but noted that it can only be effective with intragovernmental coordination between the Public Ministry and other state institutions.

- **Genocide Victims Receive Dignified Burial**

The Indigenous community of San Martín Jilotepeque came together in late June to finally give a proper and dignified [burial](#) to victims of a massacre suffered by the town during the height of the Guatemalan Civil War. The remains had sat for nearly 20 years in a small vault at the Pacoj cemetery after being recovered by the government from a mass grave. Identification and a proper burial was promised, but the government never delivered. Now, thanks to the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR) and the Center for Forensic Analysis and Applied Sciences (CAFCA), the victims are properly honored. It was the second such burial in Chimaltenango, following a 2018 ceremony for 172 remains recovered from a military detachment in San Juan Comalapa.

The killing of the 68 victims traces to February 12, 1982, when the army entered San Martín Jilotepeque and executed dozens of men, women, and children as part of the scorched-earth counterinsurgency campaign waged by the state against Indigenous communities. According to the Commission for Historical Clarification, 90% of the over 200,000 deaths and disappearances from the internal armed conflict are attributed to state and paramilitary forces, and has classified massacres such as these as acts of genocide. Justice for the victims has been elusive. Fernando Romeo Lucas García, the President at the time of the massacres, was never tried. His brother Manuel Benedicto Lucas García, the army's chief of staff, was sentenced to 58 years in 2018 in the Molina Theissen case but never convicted in the Ixil genocide case opened against him in 2024. Under the administration of former Attorney General Consuelo Porras, many cases against military officials accused of crimes against humanity were suspended.