



Monthly Information Package Guatemala

Number 256 - January 2025

1. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Monthly update on the situation in Guatemala as highlighted by the press, related to the main thematic areas of PBI Guatemala's work: the fight against impunity, land issues and defense of territory.

A lack of judicial independence, one of Guatemala's greatest challenges

Early this year, Human Rights Watch published its 2025 Report, in which it discusses several issues Guatemala is facing, with a particular focus on the lack of judicial independence, which undermines the rule of law and threatens human rights (HR) protections. The report notes that the causes are systemic and linked to “the judicial selection process, including non-transparent nomination procedures, political meddling, and undue influence from corrupt actors. The judiciary often fails to hold powerful interests accountable, instead serving to protect them.”¹

The report specifically mentions the case of journalist José Rubén Zamora, who was granted house arrest in October after he exceeded the legal limit for time in pre-trial detention, which was qualified by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention as excessive.² However, one month after he was granted house arrest, the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECI) appealed the verdict and the Second Court of Appeals ordered his return to prison. This order has not been carried out because it was temporarily suspended by a pending injunction in the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ).³

In addition to the Zamora case, the report mentions that the judiciary has created a hostile environment for the exercise of freedom of expression and the press in Guatemala. Journalists face arbitrary detentions, restrictions on news coverage and online harassment, particularly when they are investigating issues related to corruption and human rights violations.⁴ However, despite this situation, the Constitutional Court (CC) recently ruled to deny protection to former journalists and columnists who worked for the now defunct newspaper *elPeriódico* and who are being criminalized by FECI, which has accused them of obstruction of justice because of their investigative reporting on cases brought by FECI.⁵

Another case mentioned as an example of political persecution and malicious delays is the criminal prosecution of attorney Claudia González. She has been under indictment for 17 months for abuse of authority, a crime that only public servants can commit, despite the fact that she is not a public servant. In January, a hearing in her case was suspended once again.⁶

MP issues arrest warrants for two indigenous leaders

On December 23, the Public Prosecutor's Office issued arrest warrants for Pablo Ceto Sánchez and Miguel Sanic Itzep, accusing them of ties to the Chacalté massacre. According to the MP's argument, as leaders of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), they attacked the inhabitants of the village of Chacalté on June 13, 1982.⁷ Pablo Ceto was a founder of the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC), has been a congressman and

¹ Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2025](#), 15 Jan 2025.

² Váldez, A., [ONU concluye que la detención de Jose Rubén Zamora es “arbitraria”](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 7 Feb 2024.

³ España, D., [CSJ ampara a Zamora y suspende orden de regreso a prisión](#), 13 Jan 2025.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, Op. Cit.

⁵ Redacción, [La Corte de Constitucionalidad avala la criminalización de periodistas](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 8 Jan 2025.

⁶ Alfaro, A., [Claudia González, una abogada implacable contra la injusticia](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 8 Dec 2024; Ramón, S. A., [Magistrado Manuel Aldana se excusa de conocer recusación contra el juez Jimi Bremer](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 20 Jan 2025.

⁷ Aguilar, D., [Giran orden de captura contra ex candidato presidencial Pablo Ceto por el caso “Masacre de Chacalté”](#), epinvestiga, 23 Dec 2024.

presidential candidate, and is currently president of the Ixil University, an educational model based on ancestral Maya knowledge. The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), Ceto's political party, has condemned the charges against Ceto as unjust and an attempt to delegitimize leaders and social movements dedicated to the defense of the rights of indigenous peoples.⁸

The long process of criminalization continues against Rigoberto Juárez and Ermitaño López

On January 7, a public CC hearing was scheduled to announce the court's ruling on an injunction presented by Rigoberto Juárez Mateo and Ermitaño López Reyes, ancestral authorities and defenders of the rights of the indigenous peoples in Huehuetenango's Q'anjob'al, Chuj, Akateko, Popti' and Mestizo territories.⁹ The injunction was filed to request a guarantee of due process, as well as to vacate a series of legal actions related to the criminal prosecution of the two human rights defenders. However, the hearing was cancelled due to internet connection issues and rescheduled for February 3.¹⁰ Rigoberto Juárez, who had already expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that the hearing was not being held in person, stated that the internet connection should not be a valid excuse to cancel the public hearing.¹¹

Both human rights defenders were criminalized for leading community opposition to the imposition of hydroelectric dams in Santa Eulalia, San Mateo Ixtatán and Santa Cruz Barillas during the government of Otto Pérez Molina (2012-2015).¹² In 2016 they were tried by a court and acquitted of the crimes the Public Prosecutor's Office had charged them with. But later, in a second trial, an Appeals Court modified the sentence, increasing the prison sentences to 8 and 24 years respectively, while adding illegal detentions and incitement to commit a crime to Ermitaño López's charges and illegal detentions to Rigoberto Juárez's charges.¹³ The two men filed an injunction with the CC after the Criminal Court of the CSJ confirmed the Appeals Court's sentence in June 2024, despite the fact that, according to attorney Santiago Choc, the CSJ's sentence runs contrary to justice and constitutional rights.¹⁴ The injunction, which was filed before the CC in July 2024, seeks to annul the CSJ Criminal Court ruling, on the grounds of violations to the defenders' access to justice, right to defense and due process. This injunction represents the last national-level legal action available to the two defenders to prevent their conviction.

Second trial in the Achí Women case

On January 28, the second trial in the Achí Women's case began. The first trial ended in January 2022 with five ex-PACs convicted for sexual violence and crimes against humanity committed against Achí women from Rabinal, Baja Verapaz during the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC).

High Risk Court B is holding this second trial against three other ex-PACs, for the same crimes as those in the first trial. The three defendants, Pedro Sánchez Cortez, Simeón Enríquez Gómez and Félix Tum Ramírez, were removed from the proceedings in 2019 due to a decision by Judge Claudette Domínguez, which was later overturned by a higher court.

In the current trial, the court will hear testimonies from three survivors in person, as well as from three other survivors whose testimonies were recorded in advance of the trial and from several eyewitnesses. There will also be expert testimony on: the impact of sexual violence on the individual, family and community lives of indigenous women; the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war; the army's counterinsurgency policy; and the organization and military relevance of the PAC.¹⁵

⁸ Prensa Comunitaria, [MP mantiene persecución contra defensores de derechos humanos](#), 29 Dec 2024.

⁹ Ovalle, L., [CC suspende vista pública en favor de dirigentes indígenas, por falta de internet](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 8 Jan 2025.

¹⁰ Ramón, S. A., [Por segunda ocasión suspenden vista pública de amparo de Rigoberto Juárez y Ermitaño López](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 22 Jan 2025.

¹¹ Ovalle, L., Op. Cit.

¹² Ramón, S.A., [Huehuetenango: dos autoridades comunitarias podrían regresar a prisión por delitos que no cometieron](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 21 Aug 2024.

¹³ Ramón, S. A., *ria*, 22.01.25, Op. Cit.

¹⁴ Ovalle, L., Op. Cit.

¹⁵ Asociación Bufete Jurídico Popular and Impunity Watch, [Segundo juicio del Caso Mujeres Achí](#), January 2025.

2. ACCOMPANIMENTS¹⁶

PBI accompanies social organizations and individuals who have received threats for their work in the defence and promotion of human rights. In this context we are accompanying social processes in the fight against impunity, land inequality and defense of territory.¹⁷

THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY

This month we accompanied the **Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)** to several hearings in the Hogar “Seguro” case: at the hearing on January 6, a National Civil Police (PNC) agent testified, and video evidence provided by the prosecution was reviewed; at the January 13 hearing, documentary evidence was presented and testimony was given by Nery Ramos (the current president of Congress) as director general of the PNC in 2017; on January 20, a technical analyst from the MP testified regarding communications between the defendants; on January 23, Eddy Humberto Figueroa, who is the coordinating analyst for the MP’s criminal analysis department and who conducted a criminal analysis of the events that took place at the Hogar “Seguro” on March 7 and 8, 2017, testified; and on January 30, a criminologist presented his forensic analysis of videos and images taken on March 7 and 8, 2017 at the Hogar “Seguro.”



We accompanied the **Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR)** to a ceremony held in the Human Rights Plaza in front of the CSJ to mark the start of the second trial in the Achí Women’s case against three ex-PAC accused of sexual violence and crimes against humanity committed during the IAC). This event took place on January 28, prior to the first hearing, and consisted of a ceremony in which the Achí Women called on the media and civil society to closely follow the trial. The AJR and other human rights organizations were present to support the Achí women.

DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

On January 7th we accompanied the **Peaceful Resistance of the Poqomam People of Chinautla** when a Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) employee visited to assess the state of the water sources and observe the sand industries’ impact on the territory.

During this visit, the Resistance asked the MARN technician to put an end to the problem, which has ravaged the region since 1995, when large-scale sand extraction using heavy machinery began. From that moment on they began to suffer serious consequences: machinery causing the ground to move, cracking their houses; respiratory problems due to the constant dust in the air; the deterioration of the quality of the local clay, the raw material used for pottery, an essential economic activity in Chinautla.



¹⁶ We maintained regular contact with accompanied organizations who are not specifically mentioned in this section, but there are no activities to highlight.

¹⁷ See our website for general information on organizations and individuals we accompany: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/en/groups-and-individuals-currently-accompanied-pbi>

THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO LAND

We continue to hold meetings with the general coordinator of the **Verapaz Union of Peasant Organizations (UVOC)**, Carlos Morales, to follow up on and stay up to date about the security situation and the organization's work in defense of land access. We were also closely following the worrisome security situation of the Lajeb Kej community, which after months of peaceful resistance, participation in round-table discussions and conciliatory meetings with the landowner, was evicted on Wednesday, January 22, despite having filed an injunction with the necessary documentation to verify the community's land ownership (see the first communiqué at the end of this document).

In addition, we held update meetings and maintained ongoing communication with the leadership of the **Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA) - Verapaces Region**, to stay up to date on their security situation and on the issue of evictions in the region.

3. POLITICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Meetings and other contact with the diplomatic bodies, international organisations and Guatemalan authorities.

Meetings with national and international authorities are an important way for PBI to make known what we do and what our objectives are. Through these meetings, where necessary and in a reserved manner, we share our concerns about worrying situations that we have witnessed first-hand from the work we do in the field.

With respect to our dialogue with the diplomatic corps, this month we met with:

- Isabel MacDonald, Human Rights Officer of the **British Embassy**.
- Jennifer Echevarría, Political Officer of the **Delegation of the European Union in Guatemala**.
- Erick Ulate, **Ambassador of Costa Rica**.
- Juan Antonio Frutos Goldaratz, Minister-Counsellor (Second in Command) and Human Rights Officer of the **Embassy of Spain**.

4. ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA OUTSIDE GUATEMALA

Outside the country we constantly develop and strengthen the network of support for the Guatemalan PBI project, as this is one of the essential tools necessary to protect defenders of human rights. Regional Representatives, the Project Office Coordinator and other members of the committee and the Project Office and national groups of PBI, conduct public relations campaigns with many NGOs, agencies and national governments, parliamentarians and others. In this context we develop actions and public relations campaigns, and / or advocacy aimed at protecting defenders of human rights.

La Representante Europea del proyecto este mes se reunió con:

- Yovo Panchev, Bulgaria's representative to the **Council of the European Union's Working Party for Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (COLAC)**.
- Eva Nullens, Human Rights Unit, and Amadeo Bosser, Central America and Caribbean desk, both from the **Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**.
- Ana Vicente, Human Rights Advisor to the **European Parliament's GUE political group**.
- Clara Olander Molin, officer in the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights office, Olof Skook, Karolien Kras, Guatemala desk, and Juan José García Carreño, from the Human Rights unit, all from the **European External Action Service**.
- Fernando Barrena Arza, MEP for the European Parliament's GUE Party and member of the Delegation to the **Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (DLAT)**.
- *Diana Riba i Giner, MEP from the Green Party and President of the **Delegation for Central America (DCAM)**, her assistant Sergi Zorrilla, MEP from the same party and member of the Development Commission, her assistant Luis Vilacha, and Garance Tardieu, Green Party advisor for Latin America, all from the **European Parliament**.*

5. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA



This month we are publishing the **sixteenth issue of the Popular Bulletin entitled The Path of the Peoples' Words**. This bulletin is based on the history of the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPR) of the Sierra. This history was collectively reconstructed with the aim of sharing these communities' ideas and forms of resistance in defense of their lands and territories in order to strengthen their organization. You can access it by clicking here: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/es/multimedia/boletín-popular>

Furthermore, a **new episode of our ACÉRCATE podcast is now available**. In this episode, we visit the Nuevo Horizonte community and cooperative in Petén to hear about their struggles, past and present. Nuevo



Horizonte is a community of ex-combatants from one of the extinct Guatemalan guerrilla groups, the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), which very successfully traded weapons for ideas. In this episode, we will learn about several of the life projects they are developing. Access the episode on our website: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/es/multimedia/acercate-podcast> or on Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/0RpCj14cCOv5e07WwZHg97?si=jidbPV42SXujLoUduaDolw>

6. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

In this section we publish statements (some abbreviated) from human rights organisations in which they express their concerns regarding recent events.



LA UNIÓN VERAPACENSE DE ORGANIZACIONES CAMPESINAS -UVOC- MIEMBROS DEL CONSEJO CAMPESINO NACIONAL A LA OPINIÓN PÚBLICA NACIONAL E INTERNACIONAL, HACE SABER:

Repudiamos el desalojo en la comunidad maya Q'eqchi' Lajeb Kej, Tukurú, Alta Verapaz. Este miércoles 22 de enero de 2025, la comunidad maya Q'eqchi' de Lajeb Kej enfrenta nuevamente un violento desalojo judicial promovido por el Juzgado de Primera Instancia Penal de Narcoactividad y Delitos contra el Medio Ambiente de Alta Verapaz, el Ministerio Público (MP) y empresarios locales.

Por órdenes judiciales, el Estado de Guatemala ha arremetido contra esta comunidad indígena. Desde tempranas horas de la mañana, un contingente de aproximadamente 500 policías llegó al territorio con el objetivo de desalojar a las familias que lo habitan. Durante el desalojo, las fuerzas policiales destruyeron viviendas, quemaron pertenencias y cosechas, dejando a las familias sin hogar ni sustento. Aunque en esta ocasión no se reportó la matanza de animales, el año pasado trabajadores asociados con Ángel Wilfredo Choc Isem ya habían incurrido en este tipo de actos violentos, incluyendo la intimidación armada con rifles y pistolas calibre .22.

Este desalojo ha dejado a familias indígenas sin techo ni protección, atentando contra sus derechos fundamentales, incluyendo el derecho a una vivienda digna, acceso a la tierra y seguridad alimentaria. Las acciones del Estado no garantizaron el respeto a los derechos humanos ni las garantías constitucionales de las familias Q'eqchi'. No se les permitió ejercer su derecho a la defensa, no fueron notificadas con antelación, y no se les dio tiempo para retirar sus pertenencias antes del desalojo.

Como Unión Verapacense de Organizaciones Campesinas (UVOC), repudiamos enérgicamente las acciones de las autoridades judiciales, el Ministerio Público y los empresarios locales, quienes, de forma sistemática, apoyan a terratenientes en su intento de despojar a las comunidades Q'eqchi' y Poqomchi' de sus territorios ancestrales.

La comunidad Lajeb Kej surgió en 2019, cuando familias dispersas en comunidades cercanas decidieron unirse para enfrentar la crisis provocada por la pandemia de COVID-19. Desde entonces, han habitado y trabajado este territorio de forma colectiva.

Denunciamos que el Estado de Guatemala está violando los protocolos internacionales de protección de derechos humanos aplicables a desalojos. Asimismo, señalamos a los terratenientes, jueces y auxiliares de D.H que han sido cómplices en la vulneración de los derechos de las familias indígenas y campesinas.

Exigimos al gobierno de Guatemala que detenga estas acciones inmediatamente y busque una solución integral para las 50 familias que hoy se encuentran sin hogar, sin tierra y sin un lugar donde refugiarse.

IXIMULEW KAB'LAJUJ TZ'IKIN



EXIGIMOS JUSTICIA EN EL SEGUNDO JUICIO DEL CASO MUJERES ACHI

Hoy inicia el segundo juicio del caso de Mujeres Achi contra tres ex patrulleros de autodefensa civil (PAC), acusados de violencia sexual y delitos contra los deberes de humanidad cometidos en los años 80 en Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.

Este es uno de los casos de violencia sexual más emblemáticos del conflicto armado interno, en el cual se evidencia cómo el ejército, los patrulleros de autodefensa civil y los comisionados militares, utilizaron la violencia sexual como arma de guerra para atacar a las mujeres y someter a las comunidades indígenas bajo su control.

Este segundo juicio se realizará en el Tribunal de Mayor Riesgo B contra los ex patrulleros Pedro Sánchez Cortez, Simeón Enrique Gómez y Felix Tum Ramírez, quienes fueron liberados arbitrariamente por la jueza Claudette

Domínguez en el 2019. Sin embargo, con las apelaciones presentadas por las abogadas del caso, fue posible revertir la decisión de la jueza Domínguez y ahora los acusados enfrentarán juicio.

Las organizaciones nacionales e internacionales firmantes expresamos nuestra solidaridad y admiración a las Mujeres Achi, por su fortaleza en la búsqueda de justicia por más de 40 años, y manifestamos nuestro respaldo a la Asociación Bufete Jurídico Popular de Rabinal, que participa como querellante adhesivo en este caso. Seguiremos acompañando a las sobrevivientes para garantizar el acceso a la justicia.

Hacemos un llamado a los medios de comunicación y a la población en general para seguir este proceso de cerca, como ocurrió en el primer juicio en enero de 2022.

¡JUSTICIA PARA LAS MUJERES ACHI!

Guatemala, 28 de enero de 2025

Alianza de Mujeres y Mujeres Indígenas por el Acceso a la Justicia (AMMI); Alianza Estratégica de Mujeres CEDAW en Guatemala; Alianza Nacional CAIMUS; Alianza por las Reformas AxR; Asociación Civil Verdad y Vida; Asociación COINCIDIR; Asociación de Mujeres Activas de Jutiapa; Asociación de Mujeres Alas de Mariposas; Asociación de Mujeres Aq'ab'al; Asociación de Mujeres Ixq'anil Pa'laq Ha'; Asociación de Mujeres para Estudios Feministas (AMEF); Asociación de Trabajadoras del Hogar, a Domicilio y de Maquila (ATRAHDOM); Asociación el despertar de Mujeres de Oratorio (ASOEDO); Asociación Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos de Guatemala (FAMDEGUA); Asociación Grupo de Mujeres Sanjuaneras (AGIMS); Asociación Integral en Género y Derechos Humanos para América (ASIGDHA); Asociación K'amal'b'e; Asociación Memoria, Dignificación y Esperanza (AMDE); Asociación Pop No'; Asociación Q'anil San Juan Sacatepéquez; Be Just; Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH); Colectiva Actoras de Cambio; Colectiva para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres en Guatemala; Colectiva Ximonik; Colectivo de Familiares de Víctimas del Diario Militar; Colectivo Estamos Aquí; Colectivo Las Libélulas Guatemala; Colectivo por la memoria histórica USAC; Colectivo Tz'unun Ya'; Comité Cambridge; Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM) Guatemala; Conferencia de Religiosos y Religiosas de Guatemala (CONFREGUA); Convergencia por los Derechos Humanos; Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA); Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP); Fundación Guillermo Toriello; Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM); Grupo Intersectorial por los derechos humanos, derechos sexuales y reproductivos; Guías de las Memorias; HIJOS Guatemala; Impunity Watch; Las Crisálidas; Montreal Elders for Environmental Justice Canada; Movimiento Poder Constituyente de las Mujeres; Movimiento por la Democracia; Mujeres con valor construyendo un futuro mejor (MUVACOFUM); Mujeres Transformando el Mundo; Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA); Oficina en Washington para Asuntos Latinoamericanos (WOLA); Organización de Mujeres Tierra Viva; Organización Trans Reinas de la Noche (OTRANS-RN); Otra Guatemala Ya; Plataforma Canadá de Guatemaltecas Exiliadas por Terrorismo de Estado; Plataforma Nacional de Organizaciones de Víctimas del Conflicto Armado Interno; Red de Jóvenes para la Incidencia Política (INCIDEJOVEN); Red de la no Violencia (REDNOVI); Red Guatemalteca Mujeres Positivas en Acción; Red Internacional de Solidaridad con Guatemala (RISG); Rights Action; Sindicato de trabajadoras independiente del trabajo doméstico, similares y a cuenta propia (SITRADOMSA); Todos por Guatemala/ All for Guatemala; Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas (UNAMG).

The team of volunteers in PBI Guatemala is currently composed of Anna Morales Mateu (Spain), Ana Gabriela Ascarrunz Ponce (Bolivia), Sebastián Aguirre Orozco (Colombia), David Félix Azemar (Spain), Giulia Pochini (Italy), María Alemany (Spain), Beatriz Pérez Ruiz (Spain) y Júlía García Grané (Spain).

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**GUATEMALA PROJECT
PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL**

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