



## Monthly Information Package Guatemala

Number 260 - May 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.*

#### **Murder of two environmental and territorial defenders**

Marco Antonio Zuleta Quevedo, a forest firefighter and park ranger at the Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve (RBSM), was shot and killed on May 9 as he was heading home in Usumatlán, Zacapa. He had filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) a few weeks earlier, after receiving death threats by phone for reporting illegal activities in the area. RBSM attributes his murder to "people or groups opposed to conservation and biodiversity, who seek to illegally exploit natural resources, to the detriment of the Guatemalan people."

This murder is not an isolated case. Five days later, on May 14, Misael Mata Asencio, a member of the anti-mining resistance in Livingston, Izabal, was also shot and killed. He was found dead on a plantation owned by Refinsa, the company where he worked as a security guard. Mata was a land rights defender and participated in the resistance movement, which is made up of 54 communities in the Sierra Santa Cruz, where the company Río Nickel S.A. is seeking to operate.

According to the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEQUA), 60 environmentalists and indigenous and land rights defenders were killed between 2014 and 2024. According to the organization Global Witness, the figure is higher, with 78 murders recorded during the same period. Furthermore, this organization notes that most of the murders that occurred between 2014 and 2023 were perpetrated in the departments of Izabal and Alta Verapaz, "areas rich in water and natural resources, but which also experience high levels of social conflict due to the presence of extractive industries."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the high risk faced by land and environmental defenders in Guatemala, the country has not yet ratified the Escazú Agreement. "The Agreement was signed in September 2018 by the Guatemalan government, but it has not yet been ratified. The internal procedure still needs to be completed, which requires approval by the Guatemalan Congress and ratification by the executive branch." The Escazú Agreement "stands out as the first in the world to contain specific provisions on human rights defenders (HRDs) in environmental matters." "This legal tool seeks to guarantee access to information, public participation, access to justice in environmental matters, and protection for environmental defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean."<sup>2</sup>

#### **UN rapporteur concludes that there is "a consistent and alarming picture of criminalization" in Guatemala<sup>3</sup>**

The U.N. Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite, visited the country from May 12 to 23 at the invitation of the government. She met with "lawyers, legal institutions, judges, prosecutors, and members of civil society to get a clear picture of how the justice system works in Guatemala."

<sup>1</sup> Figueroa, K., [Crímenes de defensores de ambiente y territorio en Zacapa e Izabal](#), Agencia Ocote, 20 May 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Prensa Libre, [Acuerdo de Escazú: cómo contribuye a la protección ambiental y cuál es su estado en Guatemala](#), 29 Sep 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Pérez D., S., [Relatora de justicia de ONU: Fiscalía guatemalteca implementó política de criminalización en el país](#), Ap News, 24 May 25.

The Rapporteur criticized Attorney General Consuelo Porras, sanctioned by more than 40 countries for undermining democracy and obstructing the fight against corruption. She said that Porras focuses on and criminalizes “those who have sought to end impunity and corruption, defend human rights, or speak out against abuses of power.” According to Satterthwaite, “criminalization operates through a set of identifiable actions involving the MP, members of the judiciary, and often certain private actors.” Based on information gathered during her visit, cases in the human rights system of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the UN itself, she concluded that Guatemala reveals “a consistent and alarming picture of criminalization.” She added that “this persecution appears to be intensifying, as those who have sought to end impunity and corruption, defend human rights, or speak out against abuses of power increasingly face digital harassment, threats, and the imposition of criminal charges.”

The Rapporteur also met with Porras, who she said denied the allegations. She shared, “During our meeting, the Attorney General and her colleagues presented themselves as victims of attacks by the executive branch and its allies.” The Attorney General’s Office has expressed its disagreement with Satterthwaite’s preliminary report and has assured that “it has multiple international certifications that attest to its work and accountability.” However, the Rapporteur asserts that “criminalization terrorizes and harms people and their communities,” emphasizing that “the instrumental use of criminal law by the Prosecutor General’s Office appears to amount to a systematic pattern of intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights, targeted at specific groups.” “Among the groups she referred to are judges, independent prosecutors and lawyers, journalists, indigenous authorities, peasant leaders, student leaders, and members of nominating commissions.” “Criminal charges have been directed at more than 60 justice operators and defense or human rights lawyers.” “Many individuals involved in the fight against corruption and impunity have been charged with crimes at key moments in their work.”

In light of this, the Rapporteur called on the Public Prosecutor’s Office to stop criminalization and to be a more effective body, saying that “the narrative of great effectiveness and efficiency put forward by the MP does not seem to stand up to scrutiny.” She also called on the Guatemalan government to “make a clear public commitment” to end this application of criminal law and “ensure that members of the legal profession can exercise their profession free from threats and help victims of criminalization in exile.” In response, the government of President Bernardo Arévalo acknowledged “the important work” carried out by the Special Rapporteur “with high standards of professionalism, objectivity, and ethics.”

The Rapporteur also “expressed concern about the selection of magistrates and judges and the mechanism by which they are selected, such as the nominating commissions, which should be reviewed and adapted to ensure that the most suitable candidates are selected through transparent elections, as the shortcomings of these mechanisms ‘have allowed the process to be tarnished by political and private interests.’”

### **New historic sentence in the Mujeres Achí case: conviction for crimes against humanity committed in the form of sexual violence**

In January of this year, a second trial began. It was spurred forward by Achí women who have been seeking justice since 2011, when, with the support of the Rabinal Community Legal Clinic, they filed charges with the Public Prosecutor’s Office (MP) for violence they suffered at the hands of several former Civil Defense Patrolmen (PACs) between 1981 and 1983, during the IAC. The first trial concluded in January 2022 with a 30-year prison sentence against five ex-PAC for crimes against humanity and sexual violence committed against the survivors of these crimes. This first sentence confirmed that “sexual violence was used as a weapon of war during the internal armed conflict. The army, military commissioners, and PAC used sexual violence in a widespread and systematic way to bring women and Indigenous communities under military control. This practice was particularly serious in Rabinal, where the State’s armed forces attacked women in their homes, at the local military base, at a PAC encampment, and in public places within the communities. Additionally, many women were forced to cook and carry out domestic services for the soldiers under threat of being murdered, as in the Sepur Zarco case.”<sup>4</sup>

However, during this first trial, three of the ex-PACs initially charged—Pedro Sánchez Cortéz, Simeón Enrique Gómez, and Félix Tum Ramírez—were released. But in March 2022, it was decided that these three men would face their own trial, which began in January 2025 and ended on May 30 with a sentence of 40 years in prison without parole for each of the defendants for crimes against humanity committed in the form of sexual

<sup>4</sup> Impunity Watch, [Sentence in the Maya Achí Women’s Case Summary](#), Guatemala, 2022.

violence. Once again, Guatemala is making history by prosecuting and convicting perpetrators of serious crimes, thanks to the tireless struggle of the surviving victims. Unfortunately, seven of the 36 victims who brought charges in this long process died during the proceedings.<sup>5</sup> The survivors who have been able to close this long chapter in their search for justice have stated that this case seeks to “vindicate the memory and struggle of those who are no longer with us,” referring to their deceased comrades. As lawyer Lucía Xiloj stated in her opening statement at the trial, the trial is not only about judging the facts and identifying those responsible; instead, “the goal is to remember that serious human rights violations took place in our country” and to ensure that “justice is a mechanism for healing and contributing to ensure that these events never happen again.”

The sentences in the Achí Women’s case have been described as “one of the most emblematic cases of sexual violence in the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC),”<sup>6</sup> though this is not the first time that a court has determined that sexual violence was used as a weapon of war. Other transitional justice cases such as Sepur Zarco, Molina Thiessen, and the Ixil Genocide case have already revealed the “systemic pattern of using sexual violence as a weapon of war in the context of internal armed conflict” with the aim of “destroying women’s dignity” and affecting their families and communities.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, given the seriousness of the crimes in question, and as lawyer Gloria Elvira Reyes Xitumul stated at the first hearing, “it is important for society as a whole that these cases do not go unpunished,” and that “it is the State’s obligation to provide comprehensive reparations to the victims.”

This second trial marked the culmination of a long struggle for justice for the women victims and survivors of these atrocities. They decided to fight against impunity and, as lawyer Haydee Valey said, contribute to ensuring that such horrific events never happen again and that the state never again uses sexual violence to sow terror among its population. Now there is a hopeful path toward dignified reparations and the non-repetition of such crimes. The court has set a hearing date on June 4, 2025 to decide on those reparations.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Former Undersecretary for Social Welfare temporarily removed from the Hogar “Seguro” case**

On May 15, the former undersecretary of the Secretariat for Social Welfare, Anahí Keller, was temporarily removed from the Hogar Seguro trial. She was charged with abuse of minors, abuse of authority, dereliction of duty, manslaughter, and negligent injury. The judge executed a Constitutional Court (CC) ruling stating that the court cannot hear Keller’s case.<sup>9</sup>

Anahí Keller was present at the Virgen de la Asunción state-run shelter on March 7, 2017, when 41 girls died in a fire and others were seriously injured. Diana Vivar, a lawyer for several plaintiffs, states that “Anahí Keller was one of the highest authorities within the child and adolescent protection system. She had the responsibility to safeguard the lives and dignity of the girls in her care. Not bringing her to justice amounts to impunity.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Álvarez Nájera, L., [ExPAC culpables de crímenes de lesa humanidad contra mujeres Achí](#), Agencia Ocote, 30 May 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> First hearing in the Achí Women’s case, 28 Jan 25.

<sup>8</sup> Álvarez Nájera, Op. Cit.

<sup>9</sup> García, O. y Vargas, E., [Anahí Keller queda fuera del juicio por el Caso Hogar Seguro, tras amparo provisional otorgado por la CC](#), Prensa Libre, 15 May 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Longo Bautista, M.J., [Anahí Keller queda fuera del juicio del Hogar Seguro: querellantes apelarán](#), Agencia Ocote, May 2025.

## 2. ACCOMPANIMENTS<sup>11</sup>

*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.<sup>12</sup>*

### THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY

This month, we accompanied:

- The **Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)** in an artistic action as part of the conference “*Color and Rebellion: Memory that Resists, Art that Fights,*” organized by the Dexpierte collective. During this activity, two murals were painted at the organization’s offices in tribute to the founders of FAMDEGUA and all those who were disappeared during the IAC in Guatemala. This space seeks to offer survivors, who suffered violence and lost loved ones, a shared space of memory where they can reconnect with their history and strengthen their collective struggle for truth and justice.
- The **Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR)** on their trip to Nebaj (Quiché) to commemorate the 2013 genocide ruling. As part of the event, the organization visited mass graves where people who were killed during the different massacres in the region were buried. Afterwards, they held a Mayan ceremony in honor of the victims. During the activities, they also recalled their struggles for justice and presented awards to the witnesses, whose courage in giving testimony was key to securing the genocide conviction.



- The **Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)** at three key hearings in the Hogar Seguro case, during which witness statements were heard and closing arguments began. The testimonies presented included those of Alma Azucena Calleja Segura, social communications officer at the Office of the Attorney General (PGN), and Marvin Rolando Bautista Gutiérrez, psychologist and external consultant to the same institution at the Hogar. Afterwards, the public prosecutor from the MP and the lawyer from Mujeres Transformando el Mundo presented their closing arguments. Both recounted the facts of the case and the evidence presented during the trial and outlined the charges against the defendants. During one of the hearings, by order of the Constitutional Court (CC), it was ruled that the defendant Anahí Keller, former undersecretary for social welfare, be removed from the trial until an appeal she had filed was resolved.

<sup>11</sup> We maintained regular contact with accompanied organizations who are not specifically mentioned in this section, but there are no activities to highlight.

<sup>12</sup> 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

This month, we accompanied the **Verapaz Union of Peasant Organizations (UVOC)** in its first Women's Congress, an event that brought together more than 60 women from different communities in the Verapaces which the Ixq Mayaj Association has visited in recent months. During the gathering, participants highlighted the importance of strengthening the women-led local economy and promoting women's active participation in their communities. They also addressed issues that directly impact them, including evictions and child malnutrition, which they identified as factors that compound their vulnerability.



### DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

This month we accompanied:

- We accompanied the **Peaceful Resistance of the Poqomam People of Chinautla** during a public hearing in the trial against the municipality of Chinautla for the accumulation of solid waste polluting the river and its surroundings. The Resistance reports that this situation is causing serious pollution, with sewage and other waste entering the soil, water, and air in the area inhabited by the community. The hearings will continue, as will the Poqomam people's demands that the municipality take responsibility for cleaning up and permanently closing the landfills responsible for this serious pollution.
- The **Indigenous Council of Olopa** during a hearing against Ovidio Cardona, owner of the coffee company La Conquista S.A., for polluting two lakes and causing further environmental damage. We were also present at the inauguration of their new headquarters in the community of La Prensa, where the organization also held its monthly assembly.



With deep respect and solidarity, we remember **Abelino Salvador Mejía Cancino**, member of the board of directors of the **Council of Communities of Retalhuleu (CCR)**, who passed away this May. Our deepest condolences go out to his family, friends, and comrades in the struggle.



Abelino was a leading figure in the defense of territory. He was a committed leader in the struggle to recover rivers affected by agribusiness on the southern coast, particularly by the sugar cane industry. He was also known for his tireless defense of the right to water and food in communities affected by industrial practices that have degraded and polluted the region's natural resources.

Although his passing has filled us with sadness, his example, commitment, and spirit of struggle live on. **His legacy inspires and will continue to inspire future generations of defenders of territories and life.**

### 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.*

In our dialogue with the diplomatic corps, this month we (along with other organizations) met with Hardly Boeckle, **German Ambassador**, Sabine Eichman, Head of Cooperation for the Embassy and Jasper Alders from GIZ.

With respect to our dialogue with Guatemalan authorities, this month we met with Juan Carlos Díaz and Ingrid Amaya, heads of Cooperation and International Relations; Fernando Trabanino, head of human rights defenders and journalists; and Karen Cobos, Director of the Ombudsmen's Offices of **the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman's Office**.

### 4. INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION

*PBI Guatemala is present in international public events when requested to do so by Guatemalan social organisations, in order to show international attention and interest and in order to report internationally on what we observe.*

This month we observed:

- Hearings in the **Achí Women's Case**, including the closing arguments and the May 30 sentencing, in which the three defendants were found guilty of crimes against humanity committed in the form of sexual violence. We also observed the ceremony held prior to the hearing.
- The meeting held by the **Agency for Analysis** on May 6 to discuss attacks against community journalists and communicators, and the Technical Roundtable on Environmentalists, Land Defenders, and Indigenous Peoples held virtually on May 13 by the Ministry of the Interior's Agency for the Analysis of Attacks against Human Rights Defenders.



### 5. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA

We accompanied the **Ecumenical Christian Council of Guatemala (CECG)** to file a report with the Public Prosecutor's Office for breaking and entering and theft of documents. This report concerns the events that took place in the early morning on April 27, close to the anniversary of the assassination of Monsignor Gerardi, when unidentified individuals illegally entered the CECG premises and stole sensitive information.

On May 14, we organized a **workshop on security and protection for organizations working on transitional justice cases**, facilitated by a Guatemalan lawyer who is an expert in the field. This event, held in Guatemala City, brought together associations of victims from various parts of the country, lawyers, and research and forensic teams, all of whom are focused on issues of memory and reparation for the victims of the IAC. The workshop aimed to support the strengthening of ties between different civil society organizations working on these issues and to help jointly develop protection strategies (physical, legal, storytelling, etc.) to counter attempts to silence the truth and deny justice to victims. A total of 29 people participated (12 women and 17 men).

## 6. 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.*

This month, the project's European Representative met with:

- Garance Tardieu, **advisor** to the Green Party on **Latin American issues in the European Parliament**.
- Jorge Gallego Lizón, political officer at the **European External Action Service (EEAS)** in charge of election observation missions.
- Diego Cobo López, assistant to MEP Gabriel Matto of the European Conservatives political group, chair of the **Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (D-LAT)**.
- Mariya Stoyanova and Gunnar Theissen, policy officers at the **Office of the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing**.
- Melissa Ortiz, policy officer at the **Secretariat of the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights**, covering Latin America.
- Wim Geerts, **Dutch Human Rights Ambassador**, and Ines Veldkamp, his assistant, during a European tour by a Guatemalan human rights defender.

## 7. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

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



### Coordinadora de Organizaciones Ixiles -COI-

**CON LA ENERGÍA DE LAS ABUELAS Y ABUELOS DEL KA'VA'L IQ' NOSOTRAS Y NOSOTROS: FAMILIARES SOBREVIVIENTES DEL CONFLICTO ARMADO INTERNO, ORGANIZACIONES IXILES Y DE DERECHOS HUMANOS AGLUTINADAS EN LA COORDINADORA DE ORGANIZACIONES IXILES-COI, ANTE LA OPINION PÚBLICA NACIONAL E INTERNACIONAL MANIFESTAMOS:**

1. Se cumple otro año más de la sentencia que condenó al general Efraín Ríos Montt por genocidio, perpetuado durante su gobierno de facto entre 1982 a 1983. La condena de Ríos Montt es un hecho histórico para Guatemala, especialmente para el pueblo Maya Ixil, porque se hizo justicia a miles de hermanos Ixiles que fueron víctimas del terrorismo de Estado y de los crímenes de lesa humanidad por los militares.
2. El pueblo Maya Ixil fue uno de los más afectados por las acciones criminales del ejército de Guatemala al mando del general sentenciado. Según el Informe de la Comisión del Esclarecimiento Histórico durante el periodo de Ríos Montt, se registraron más de 300 masacres, centenares de aldeas totalmente arrasadas, miles de personas torturas, violaciones a mujeres, cientos de niños desaparecidos, destrucción de los medios de vida de la población civil, bombardeos y persecuciones, miles de familias fueron desplazadas forzosamente, por ello dicha Comisión aclaró que hubo genocidio.
3. Durante el desarrollo del juicio en el año 2013 se documentó y se comprobó a 1,771 Ixiles asesinados, mujeres violadas, personas torturadas y desaparecidas. Los testimonios de familiares sobrevivientes, aunado a peritajes específicos sobre genocidio y expertos testificaron en los Juzgados de alto impacto sobre los horrores de los crímenes cometidos durante el periodo de Ríos Montt, es por eso que los juzgados respectivos sentenciaron al general por Genocidio contra el Pueblo Maya Ixil; es así como se hace justicia, gracias a la lucha de los familiares sobrevivientes que valientemente dieron sus testimonios y participación en el proceso, como también, a todas las organizaciones que apoyaron y acompañaron de manera incondicional para que estos familiares lograron al acceso a la justicia y conseguir dicha sentencia.
4. Exhortamos al Sistema de Justicia guatemalteco, al Ministerio Público, Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos, seguir con el juicio contra el criminal Benedicto Lucas García y otros militares más, que comprende que no se pueden dejar impunes esas graves violaciones a los derechos humanos y el respeto a la memoria de las víctimas
5. **La Coordinadora de Organizaciones Ixiles** reivindica la condena por genocidio y seguir buscando justicia de otros casos de criminales y violadores de los derechos humanos, porque solo con nuestro esfuerzo obligaremos al sistema de justicia a castigar a los criminales de guerra. Así también, llamamos al Pueblo Ixil y a todos los pueblos de Guatemala, a continuar luchando por la justicia, a combatir la impunidad y a luchar contra la corrupción; no permitir que en la actual coyuntura se imponga el pacto de corruptos, unidos todos rescatemos la democracia y construyamos un país más inclusivo y respetuoso a los derechos de los pueblos como lo establecen los Acuerdos de Paz.

Nebaj 09 de mayo de 2025

**¡Voz y acción colectiva para la defensa de los derechos de los pueblos indígenas!**



**The team of volunteers in PBI Guatemala is currently composed of** Giulia Pochini (Italy), Maria Alemany (Spain), Beatriz Pérez Ruiz (Spain) y Júlía García Grané (Spain), Maria Fernanda Candela Figueroa (Mexico), Sheron Ribeiro da Silva (Brazil) y Ambroise Lavigne (France).

*All photos published are from PBI*

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**GUATEMALA PROJECT  
PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL**

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