



Monthly Information Package Guatemala

Number 264 - September 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.

Criminalization and prosecution of justice operators

Guatemala is one of the most dangerous countries for justice operators. According to the 2024 report by the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEGUA),¹ attacks against justice operators rose from 211 in 2021 to 2,048 in 2024.² This data demonstrates the increased violence against those who perform their work seriously by investigating and filing complaints, and the level of risk they face for doing their job properly. Similarly, in a report,³ United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite, highlighted the co-optation of the justice system in Guatemala and emphasized that there is a consistent and alarming pattern of criminalization against specific groups in the country.⁴

Some egregious examples of this situation include the criminalization of Virginia Laparra, Claudia González, and Paola Pimentel, among others. Former anti-corruption prosecutor Laparra was arrested in 2022 for reporting corruption by Judge Lester Castellanos. The accusation Laparra made earned her a four-year prison sentence, of which she served nearly half. In 2024, after a second case of legal persecution, Laparra was forced into exile. Despite efforts by the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) to reactivate an arrest warrant against her, the Second Appeals Court rejected the request on September 5.⁵

Meanwhile, Claudia González, a human rights lawyer and former representative of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), was arbitrarily detained in 2023⁶ for alleged influence peddling. After several months in pretrial detention, she is currently being held under house arrest and is prohibited from leaving the country without authorization, while court officials continue to drag out her case. Her case is before the Seventh Sentencing Court, and the oral and public trial phase has been scheduled for September 2026.⁷

Paola Pimentel, a former prosecutor with the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI), has faced charges and prosecution for more than a year for the alleged crime of disclosing confidential information in the Manipulation of Justice case. On September 17, Pimentel was acquitted, with the judge ruling there was not enough material evidence to prove her guilt.⁸

These are just three examples, among dozens of cases, of criminalization and prosecution of those who work against corruption and impunity in a context of judicial co-optation.⁹ Such processes are accompanied by a series of elements that fit into a pattern of criminalization of justice operators, including: exile, arbitrary

¹ UDEFEGUA, [Informe de situación de personas, organizaciones y comunidades defensoras de derechos humanos 2024](#), UDEFEGUA, July 2025.

² Gálvez, J. [Agresiones contra defensores sociales en Guatemala se mantienen](#), Agencia Ocote, 22 Aug 2025.

³ Satterthwaite, M., [Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers Visit to Guatemala, 12 to 23 May 2025 - Preliminary Observations](#), United Nations, 2025.

⁴ OACNUDH, [Guatemala debe defender la integridad del sistema de justicia y poner fin a la criminalización](#), ONU, 23 May 2025.

⁵ Valdéz, A., [Sala rechaza solicitud del MP y confirma fallo favorable para Virginia Laparra](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 05 Sep 2025.

⁶ Observatorio de Independencia Judicial, [Persecución contra la abogada Claudia González](#), OIJ, 05 Sep 2023.

⁷ Valdéz, Alexander. [Juicio contra Claudia González se programa hasta septiembre de 2026](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 12 Aug 2025.

⁸ España, D., [Revés para MP: jueza absuelve a la fiscal Paola Pimentel y declara su inocencia](#), La Hora, 17 Sep .2025.

⁹ Antonio Ramón, S., [Estudio señala que Consuelo Porras especializa al Ministerio Público para la impunidad](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 24 Jun 2025.

detentions, trials without due process, social media campaigns to smear and stigmatize, multiple complaints, online attacks, improper criminal prosecutions, etc. According to Amnesty International, “This particularly affects women, who make up a significant proportion of professionals working in the justice sector.”¹⁰

Memory against impunity: Gerardi case reopened

In September, significant steps were taken to reopen the case of the 1998 assassination of Monsignor Juan José Gerardi Conedera. Gerardi was murdered two days after the publication of the Guatemala Never Again report. The report was produced by the Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI), spearheaded by Gerardi, who served as auxiliary bishop and coordinator of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (ODHAG) at the time. In 2001, four people were convicted in connection with this case. According to the Special Prosecutor's Office, a total of 17 suspects were identified, of whom only five were civilians; the rest were employees of the state. At that time, the Third Criminal Court determined that Gerardi's murder was politically motivated because of the publication of the report, which compiled information on human rights violations committed during the internal armed conflict (IAC) in Guatemala.¹¹ This information was included in “Guatemala: Memory of Silence,” a report published by the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) in 1999, which attributed 93% of the human rights violations it documented to state forces.

On September 16, 2025, High Risk Court D sent Darío Morales García, a former specialist with the now-defunct Presidential High Command (EMP), to trial, finding that there was sufficient evidence against him to warrant an oral and public trial. The court will determine whether or not he participated in Monsignor Gerardi's murder. Morales García is charged with perjury and conspiracy to commit extrajudicial execution. According to Judge Abelina Cruz, there is evidence indicating that Morales was at the scene of the crime and may have altered parts of the crime scene in order to cover up for those responsible.¹² The evidentiary hearing was scheduled for September 22 but was suspended because the defendant's defense team recused the judge. The recusal was sent to the Second High Risk Court, which will decide whether the judge will remain on the case or be transferred to another court.¹³ It is important to note that, in late 2024, this court ruled in favor of the military personnel implicated in the CREOMPAZ case. That decision nullified all the proceedings in the CREOMPAZ case since it began in 2016 and ordered the release of the accused military personnel.¹⁴

Dario Morales is the fifth person charged with the murder of Monsignor Gerardi. In 2001, three military personnel (Byron Lima Estrada, Byron Lima Oliva, son of the former, and Obdulio Villanueva) and priest Mario Orantes were convicted. Morales was arrested in late April 2025 after being deported from the United States. He was a fugitive and had a warrant out for his arrest since 2014.¹⁵

The recovery and recognition of historical memory is a fundamental part of the fight against impunity. Monsignor Gerardi accepted this commitment and, in his role as bishop and spiritual leader, promoted the dignity of victims through the REMHI. He said just that in his speech to present the report in April 1998: “We want to contribute to the construction of a different country. That is why we recover the memory of the people. This path was and continues to be full of risks, but the construction of the Kingdom of God has risks and only those who have the strength to face them are its builders.”¹⁶ The Gerardi case is a national reference point in the search for justice to guarantee non-repetition and the recognition of the state's responsibility in this terrible chapter of Guatemalan history.

¹⁰ Amnesty International, [Guatemala: The Whole System Against Us: Criminalization of Women Justice Operations and Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala](#), 23 May 2024.

¹¹ Escobar, M., [El “fotógrafo” del Estado Mayor y la reactivación del caso Gerardi](#), No Ficción, 15 May 2025.

¹² Osegueda, S., [Caso Gerardi: Jueza envía a juicio a exespecialista del EMP](#), La Hora, 16 Sep 2025.

¹³ Antonio Ramón, S., [Defensa pública buscar retrasar el juicio del Caso Gerardi](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 22 Sep 2025.

¹⁴ Rojas, A. F., [Sala Segunda de Apelaciones anula caso Creompaz y ordena la libertad para los militares señalados](#), Prensa Libre, 05 Nov 2024.

¹⁵ Álvarez, N., [Implicado en crimen contra Gerardi enfrentará proceso penal](#), Emisoras Unidas, 05 May 2025.

¹⁶ ODHAG, [“Gerardi... memoria viva de nuestro pueblo”](#), ODHAG, April 2005.

“Without archives, there is no democracy”: Friends of UNESCO raises alarm over deterioration of the AHPN

Twenty years after the discovery of the National Police Historical Archive (AHPN) on July 6, 2005, several experts have sounded the alarm about the risks facing the archive due to a failure to comply with conservation standards. The AHPN, which is unique in Latin America in terms of its importance and size and whose existence was denied and concealed by the National Civil Police (PNC) for decades, provided evidence that Guatemalan authorities had committed political assassinations, kidnappings, torture, and forced disappearances during the IAC.¹⁷

Monitoring carried out by the Association of Friends of UNESCO in Guatemala reveals that documents held in the old archive's documentary collection are at risk of deterioration. Juan Pablo Muñoz, president of the Association, described numerous risks related to the “physical environment” in which the documents are stored, including pests, water leaks, and scrap metal left behind by the police around the premises. He also mentioned a recent fire near the building.¹⁸

Beyond its physical deterioration, the AHPN has suffered a number of attacks because it is an essential source of information for historical memory and transitional justice in the country. In 2019, Jimmy Morales' administration threatened to take control of the archive in order to return it to the PNC. In response, the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) filed an injunction, which allowed the AHPN to be declared National Cultural Heritage and the documents to remain in the custody of the Ministry of Culture and Sports (MICUDE).¹⁹

In 2021, the Constitutional Court ordered the implementation of a plan to preserve and safeguard the Archive. According to Juan Pablo Muñoz, the plan is not being followed. He also says that, since 2024, authorities have failed to share the information needed to monitor the AHPN. Nonetheless, he explains that the archive “must operate in accordance with the 2005 United Nations principles for the protection and promotion of human rights through the fight against impunity.”²⁰

In light of this situation, the Association of Friends of UNESCO in Guatemala is urging the government to resume work on the national archives bill, which would standardize archival conservation protocols nationwide. “In Guatemala, the archival culture is terrible,” says Luisa Fernanda Rivas, a former employee of the Archive and member of the Association. She also called on the Ministry of the Interior to transfer ownership of the AHPN building, which is currently held by the PNC, to MICUDE, so that it could be turned into a site of memory open to the public. If authorities fail to comply with the mandate to protect the archive, the Association will file a complaint with the Guatemalan justice system.²¹

Community leader from the department of San Marcos sentenced to one year in prison

The trial that began in 2014 against Dualer Licardie, a community leader from San Pablo in the municipality of San Marcos, ended with him being sentenced to one year in prison on charges of criminal incitement. The lawyer representing the leader stated that the ruling was given despite contradictions between the charges brought by the MP and witness accounts. She highlighted the criminalization of the resistance (which Licardie was part of) against the construction of the Tres Ríos hydroelectric plant, which sought to divert rivers for its operations.²²

This ruling comes at a time when several communities in the department of San Marcos are attempting to build their own hydroelectric plants. In late 2024, three communities in the municipality of San Pablo decided to create their own project after Energuate S.A. raised prices and cut off their access to energy. With these hydroelectric plants, community members hope to access quality energy and create new sources of income.²³

¹⁷ Doyle, K., Dorfman, C., [Invisible, Silenced, and All but Abandoned: The Guatemalan Historical Archive of the National Police on Its 20th Anniversary](#), National Security Archive, 04 Sep 25.

¹⁸ Peace Brigades International, [ACÉRCATE a la situación actual de deterioro del Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional](#), PBI Guatemala, 26 Aug 25.

¹⁹ Doyle, K., Dorfman, C., Op.Cit.

²⁰ Brigadas Internacionales de Paz., Op.Cit.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Prensa Comunitaria, [Tribunal de San Marcos condena a dirigente comunitario que se opuso a hidroeléctricas](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 24 Sep 25.

²³ Pérez, R., [Tres comunidades de San Marcos construyen sus propias hidroeléctricas](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 09 Dec 24.

2. ACCOMPANIMENTS²⁴

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.²⁵

THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY

This month, we accompanied the **Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR)** during its assembly, held in Guatemala City. Nearly 200 representatives from various communities in Huehuetenango, Quiché, Chimaltenango, Alta Verapaz, and Baja Verapaz participated.

We also accompanied the family of **Luz Leticia Hernández**, who was kidnapped and disappeared during the IAC, to the evidentiary hearing against defendant Juan Francisco Cifuentes, former head of the Fifth Corps of the National Police. During the hearing, to which the press and PBI were denied access, the defendant participated by video conference from the military hospital. After a recess, the hearing was suspended due to the defendant's sudden absence.



THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO LAND

This month, we visited Baja Verapaz as part of our accompaniment of the **Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA) - Verapaces Region** and the **Verapaz Union of Peasant Organizations (UVOC)**. We held meetings to follow up on cases of eviction and criminalization in the region, as well as the security situation of the men and women we accompany.

DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

This month, we accompanied:

- The **Peaceful Resistance of the Poqomam People of Chinautla** to three technical roundtable meetings with the municipality of Chinautla. These meetings were held in response to a ruling that found the Municipality of Chinautla responsible for water pollution in the region. Two of these meetings were held in order to guarantee the water supply and were attended by several state and government authorities, as well as indigenous authorities from the community. The other meeting aimed to find a solution to water pollution, but no agreements were reached because there were no proposals and several authorities were absent.
- The **Indigenous Council of Olopa** to the second hearing in the oral and public trial against ten criminalized human rights defenders. The purpose of the hearing was for the MP to present and incorporate evidence concerning the events that allegedly took place in 2019 during a peaceful demonstration against mining activities in the area. After new documentary evidence was presented, the judge rescheduled the hearing because it had started late and there was not enough time. The judge requested that the MP produce at least three witnesses at the next hearing. The hearings will resume the first week of October.



²⁴ We maintained regular contact with accompanied organizations who are not specifically mentioned in this section, but there are no activities to highlight.

²⁵ See our website for general information on organizations and individuals we accompany: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/en/groups-and-individuals-currently-accompanied-pbi>

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 met with:

- Sebastián Juan Paloum, Consul of the **Embassy of Argentina**.
- Isabel MacDonald, Human Rights Officer of the **Embassy of the United Kingdom**.
- We traveled to Mexico City and met with **representatives from several embassies in Mexico that serve Central America**.

With respect to our dialogue with **Guatemalan authorities**, this month we met with Silvia Fonsela, head of the **COPADEH in Alta Verapaz**.

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 the continuation of the intermediate phase of the **Gerardi case** against Rubén Darío Morales García, a former member of the Presidential High Command (EMP). Morales García is charged with acting as an accomplice in the 1998 murder of Monsignor Gerardi and with giving false testimony at trial. The defense presented its analysis regarding the inclusion of two additional testimonies as evidence, and the judge decided to close the investigation phase and open the oral and public debate phase for both charges. On September 22, the defense recused the judge, and the appeals court will decide whether to continue with the hearings (see section on current events).

5. 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.

The project's European Representative met with:

- Désirée Hermann, representative of the Permanent Representation of Sweden in the Working Parties on Latin America (COLAC) and Human Rights (COHOM) of the **European Union Council**.
- Isabelle Heyerfrigo, Guatemala desk at the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**.
- Mariya Stoyanova, Political Officer at the **Office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing**, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal.
- Garance Tardieu, advisor to the Green Party Political Group in the **European Parliament**, responsible for relations with Latin America.
- Clara Olander Molin, Political Advisor to the **European Union Special Representative for Human Rights**, Ms. Kajsa Ollongren.

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.



**Junta Directiva del Concejo de Alcaldes Comunes
48 Cantones de Totonicapán**
“Uchuq’ab’ Tinimit Chwimeq’ena’ are ri K’axk’ol”

COMUNICADO OFICIAL

DELITO DE TERRORISMO AMENAZA DERECHOS CONSTITUCIONALES 48 Cantones interpone inconstitucionalidad

La Junta Directiva de los 48 Cantones de Totonicapán, presentamos una acción de inconstitucionalidad contra el delito de Terrorismo, porque vulnera el principio de legalidad.

Asimismo, porque la forma en que está regulado representa grave riesgo para el ejercicio de derechos constitucionalmente reconocidos. El terrorismo es reprochable y deber ser sancionado y castigado en todo el mundo. Esta inconstitucionalidad no persigue condonar actos terroristas, sino que el delito se limite a perseguir acciones verdaderamente terroristas. La lucha contra el terrorismo debe darse en el marco constitucional de los Derechos Humanos y sujeto a las obligaciones convencionales.

Por lo anterior solicitamos a la Corte de Constitucionalidad que declare con lugar nuestra inconstitucionalidad para evitar que esa figura sea utilizada para reprimir a la sociedad en su legítimo derecho de exigir sus derechos.

**JUNTA DIRECTIVA DEL CONCEJO DE ALCALDES COMUNALES
48 CANTONES DE TOTONICAPÁN
Totonicapán septiembre de 2025.**

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), Nelly Horvath (Hungary), Ericka Stephania López Mota (Mexico) y Nataly Navarro (Mexico).

All photos published are from PBI

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**GUATEMALA PROJECT
PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL**

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