



Monthly Information Package Guatemala

Number 273 - June 2026

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.

Re-election at the USAC: A New Chapter in the University Governance Crisis

The process to elect the president of the University of San Carlos (USAC) offers a glimpse into the complicated situation of the rule of law in Guatemala. On April 8, Walter Mazariegos was re-elected despite strong and widespread concerns about the legality of the process. Mazariegos took office as university president in 2022, following a tumultuous process marked by allegations of fraud.¹ During his tenure, the university approved institutional reforms that have been criticized by different university-based groups, such as *USAC Dignidad y Resistencia*, because they limit opposition groups' participation. One such example was the reform of the university's electoral regulations, which granted greater authority to the University High Council (CSU) at the expense of the University Electoral Tribunal. This reform gave the CSU greater involvement in organizing and overseeing the electoral process, sparking concerns over allegations that the council had been co-opted by Mazariegos. This situation and other measures—including the criminalization of students and professors and the exclusion of opposition electoral groups—have undermined independence and increased uncertainty regarding the process to elect the university's new president.²

Mazariegos's re-election has sparked wide-ranging legal challenges and social protests. At least 17 injunctions have been filed before different courts, as well as complaints with the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP).³ However, different Courts of Appeals have ruled in Mazariegos' favor, and the Constitutional Court (CC) rejected a large portion of the injunctions filed by opposition groups, suggesting that Mazariegos' reelection will go forward on July 1 of this year.

This electoral process takes place against the backdrop of a co-opted justice system. The involvement of Judges Leyla Susana Lemus and Dina Josefina Ochoa—who have ties to Walter Mazariegos and are accused of having interfered in the rulings that ordered the dismissal of the injunctions filed against Mazariegos⁴—is a clear sign of the deeply troubling co-optation of the judicial system.

Nearly 30 Years After the Signing of the Peace Agreement: A Plan for Reparations and Dignification for Victims of the IAC⁵

This month, the Official Journal of Guatemala published a ministerial decree in which President Bernardo Arévalo ordered all government agencies to participate in the 2026–2036 Plan for Reparations and Dignification for Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC). Nearly 30 years after the signing of the Peace Accords—which brought an end to the 36-year-long IAC—Arévalo's administration announced the implementation of this Plan, as well as a mechanism to search for the disappeared.

¹ Burrión, G., [Quién es Walter Mazariegos, reelecto rector de la Usac hasta 2030, y cuál es su trayectoria en la universidad](#), Prensa Libre, 08 April 2026.

² Farfán, M., [¿Por qué la reelección de Walter Mazariegos en la Usac es un fraude?](#), Agencia Ocote, 11.04.2026.

³ Pineda, S. and Cueva, D., [Walter Mazariegos acumula 17 denuncias ante el MP y la CGC en medio de su reelección en la Usac](#), Prensa Libre, 23 June 2026; Figueroa, K., [Electores relatan los minutos previos al fraude en la Usac](#), Agencia Ocote, 10 April 2026.

⁴ García, O., Cuevas, D. and Vásquez, O., [Renovación de la CC: CSU elige a magistrados en medio de protestas en Antigua Guatemala](#), Prensa Libre, 16 February 2026.

⁵ Pérez D.S., [Guatemala anuncia plan para resarcir a víctimas y buscar desaparecidos del conflicto armado](#), AP News, 17 June 2026

The Plan includes provisions for individual and collective reparations as set forth in the 1996 Peace Accords. According to Elvin Díaz of the Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights (COPADEH), the Plan is based on the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' (IACHR) 14 judgments against the Guatemalan State for human rights violations. "To date, the State has not provided any follow-up or support to victims of disappearances; only specialized nongovernmental organizations have done so. Other countries in the region have search commissions, but we have never managed to set those up in Guatemala," said the official. He explained that the goal is to collect and record all the information gathered by organizations and state institutions—including some 54,000 files on disappeared persons, which previous governments ignored—as well as to recognize the work of NGOs and provide them with financial support so they can continue searching for the disappeared.

Francisco Vivar, a lawyer representing the relatives of victims of crimes against humanity, stated that "reparations" for those who suffered human rights violations "are a debt owed by the State." He noted that "there have been various government initiatives to provide benefits to former paramilitaries (...) which contrasts with the limited support that victims have received." In 2022, the Guatemalan Congress passed a law to provide financial compensation to thousands of civil defense patrolmen, known as PACs, who were recruited by the Army during the IAC to repress and control the population; some of the PACs have been accused of war crimes.

As Vivar notes, "victims (in general) have never received dignified reparations. It's not just about financial reparations for the loss of their family members; it's about health care systems, infrastructure..., the non-repetition of such crimes, and the right to justice." Furthermore, during Consuelo Porras's tenure as head of the MP (2018–2026), the special prosecutor's office dedicated to assisting victims of the IAC was dismantled, and the staff who were familiar with the judicial proceedings, having worked on the cases for years, were fired or transferred. Many organizations have repeatedly spoken out against this.

MP Drops Criminal Charges Against Seven Journalists and Columnists from *elPeriódico*

On June 8, following a three-year legal battle, the MP announced that it was dropping a criminal case that the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI) had brought against journalists from *elPeriódico*. The investigation, led by the widely criticized Rafael Curruchiche, sought to have a group of journalists from the now defunct newspaper *elPeriódico* prosecuted on charges of obstruction of justice, because of their opinions and reporting on alleged irregularities in the legal proceedings against the newspaper's founder, José Rubén Zamora.⁶ As part of this attempt to criminalize journalism, journalists Alexander Valdéz, Gerson Ortiz, Julia Corado, Cristian Véliz, Rony Ríos, and Denis Aguilar, as well as columnists Edgar Gutiérrez and Gonzalo Marroquín Godoy, were all criminalized.⁷

Guatemala: The Only Country in Latin America Without a Water Law⁸

Guatemala is the only country in Latin America that does not have a water law. There is unequal access to the right to water. Ninety percent of Guatemala's water is contaminated, and 54% of the Guatemalan population's drinking water contains fecal matter. This situation disproportionately affects indigenous and rural populations living in poverty.

The lack of a law to regulate the quality and equitable distribution of water represents a constitutional shortfall that has persisted for more than three decades. Article 127 of the Political Constitution of the Republic establishes that "all water is a public good, inalienable and imprescriptible. The exploitation, use, and enjoyment of water are granted in the manner established by law, in accordance with the public interest. A specific law shall regulate this matter." However, such a law has never been enacted.

Pedro Arnulfo Pineda Cotzajay, acting director of the Institute for Research in Natural Sciences and Technology (Iarna) at Rafael Landívar University (URL), and Luis Fernando Paiz Lemus, a legal researcher at the Institute for Social and Humanistic Research (ICESH) at URL, argue that, given the way water is currently being used, it is already effectively privatized, making legislation essential. As an example, they cite cases where agribusinesses divert river flows or dam up rivers, leaving surrounding communities without access to water. Or, in the capital city, residents are forced to buy water tanks due to a lack of access to the water supply. Paiz

⁶ García, O. y Gutiérrez, E., [MP afirma que desiste de continuar proceso contra periodistas y columnistas de elPeriódico](#), Prensa Libre, 08 June 2026.

⁷ Prensa Comunitaria, [MP desistió de proceso penal contra periodistas y columnistas de elPeriódico](#), 08 June 2026.

⁸ Figueroa, K., [La ley de aguas: un derecho humano pendiente en Guatemala](#), Agencia Ocote, 11 June 2026.

states that “the water law is not optional. It is a constitutional mandate that has been expressly recognized in the Constitution for the past 40 years.”

In October 2025, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) presented a draft water bill, developed after a series of discussions with civil society organizations, indigenous authorities, community leaders, and private sector representatives. Recently, on May 17, the president of Congress, Luis Contreras, stated in an interview with Canal Antigua that the bill would be introduced “next week.” However, the bill has not yet been introduced in Congress, and MARN has not provided any updates on the matter.

Yich K’isis Asks the CC to Ensure Prior Consultation on the Pojom I and II Hydroelectric Project

Representatives of the indigenous communities of Yich K’isis, in San Mateo Ixtatán, Huehuetenango, asked the CC to ensure prior, free, and informed consultation on the Pojom I and II hydroelectric projects, run by Energía y Renovación S.A., given that the projects were authorized without the consent of the affected population. The lawsuit was filed in response to a Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) ruling that ordered the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) to complete the consultation process within 12 months and then proceed with the hydroelectric project. The plaintiffs argue that this ruling does not remedy the alleged violations, since the consultation would take place after the licenses were granted and part of the construction work was already completed.⁹

The communities argue that a consultation after the fact contradicts the principle of free, prior, and informed consultation established in Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and leaves unresolved issues concerning indigenous ancestral authorities’ participation and environmental, cultural, and spiritual impact evaluations.¹⁰

The ruling only recognizes Community Development Councils (COCODES) and Municipal Development Councils (COMUDES) as stakeholders, excluding indigenous ancestral authorities, thereby limiting the participation of indigenous peoples in the process.

2. ACCOMPANIMENTS¹¹

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.¹²

THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY

This month, we accompanied:

- **Luz Leticia’s family** to several hearings in the case. Luz Leticia Hernández Agustín was detained and disappeared in November 1982 during a police operation purportedly led by Juan Francisco Cifuentes Cano, former head of the Special Operations Command, who has been accused of crimes against humanity and forced disappearance. For more information: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/es/qui%C3%A9n-acompa%C3%B1amos/acompa%C3%B1amiento-al-caso-luz-leticia>.

This month’s hearings were used to present evidence shedding light on the responsibilities and obligations of different actors involved in the disappearance of Luz Leticia. Testimony from experts and those involved, as well as analysis of police records and declassified U.S. State Department files, have revealed a number of inconsistencies that the Guatemalan government has used to avoid resolving the case.

⁹ Ríos, R., [Comunidades de Yich K’isis piden a la CC que consulta sobre hidroeléctrica no legitime decisiones tomadas sin su consentimiento](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 05 June 2026.

¹⁰ Business and Human Rights Center, [Guatemala: Comunidades de Yich K’isis denuncian la falta de consentimiento previo para hidroeléctrica de la empresa Energía y Renovación en Huehuetenango](#), 05 June 2026.

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

¹² See our website for general information on organizations and individuals we accompany: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/en/groups-and-individuals-currently-accompanied-pbi>

- Members of the **Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)** to the hearing on the recusal filed by the Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)—plaintiff in the Diario Militar case—against Judge Abelina Cruz Toscano. The judge was accused of showing hostility toward FAMDEGUA in the case. Despite arguments claiming due process guarantees had been violated, the court ruled that, since the allegations were based on suspicions, it could not be proven that the judge showed hostility toward FAMDEGUA. Therefore, Judge Abelina Cruz was allowed to remain on the case.



- The **Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR)** at the burial of 68 people who were killed during the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC), between 1981 and 1982. The burial was held at the Pacoj General Cemetery in San Martín Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango. After more than four decades of waiting and 20 years of their remains being held in a warehouse, these people—victims of state terrorism perpetrated during the IAC—were finally given a dignified burial, thanks to the efforts of their families, the AJR, and the Center for Forensic Analysis and Applied Sciences (CAFCA). Their remains were recovered during exhumations carried out between 1988 and 2024. This was an opportunity to honor the victims, to seek truth and justice, and to help the victims' families find closure in their grief.



THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO LAND

On June 9, we met with the **Verapaz Union of Peasant Organizations (UVOC)**, who updated us on their work. Their efforts to defend and promote land access in the departments of Alta and Baja Verapaz remain steadfast.

DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

This month we accompanied:

- The **Peaceful Resistance of the Poqomam People of Chinautla** during a visit to the community. We met with the women of the Resistance, who reaffirmed the vital role they play in defending their territory and asserting their right to consultation regarding sand-mining projects that affect the community. We also had a meeting with ancestral authority Efraín Martínez, who gave us an update on the Resistance's main activities, including the construction of a new bridge over the Las Vacas River and ongoing efforts to get the license for the San Luis stone quarry project revoked. On June 24, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) definitively revoked the environmental license for the La Primavera Sand Quarry and referred the decision to the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) to ensure compliance with applicable regulations. The Resistance continues to demand that the MEM resolve the situation regarding the San Luis Quarry once and for all and ensure the closing of mining operations in the area.



- The **Maya Ch'orti' Indigenous Council of Olopa**, Chiquimula, during a hearing at the Olopa court. There, the Council presented the municipality's recognition of them as an indigenous community. They also reaffirmed their opposition to the Los Manantiales quarry and to any extractive project in Ch'orti' territory that does not respect their right to prior consultation. We also accompanied the Council during a Maya ceremony marking the upcoming launch of the community radio station. They also used this gathering to renew their commitment to resisting and defending their territory against mining projects in the Ch'orti' region.

- The **National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala (REDSAG)** on two occasions. We accompanied two members of the community organization, Guardians of El Pinal Forest, to their hearing at the

Jalapa court. The activists were charged with unlawful detaining workers from a logging company that was cutting down pine trees in the community forest of San Luis Jilotepeque, Jalapa. The charges against them are not supported by objective evidence, as there was no unlawful detention, nor was there any police intervention during the incident, nor were the defendants caught in flagrante. Thus, the judge ordered that the legal proceedings against the defendants be conditionally suspended, while allowing the MP more time to gather the missing evidence.



We also accompanied the public event in defense of Guatemala's sacred corn and native seeds, which took place on June 11 behind the Congress of the Republic, at the same time that a meeting was being held between the Deputy Minister of MAGA, REDSAG, and the Multisectoral Group of Guatemala. At the event, people spoke out against Government Decree 53-2026, which paves the way for the use of GMOs in the country, putting biodiversity, food sovereignty, and indigenous peoples' biocultural heritage at risk.

- The **Indigenous Community of San Francisco Quezaltepeque** during a historic day recognizing and reclaiming their rights to communal lands. The event began with a Maya ceremony, followed by a traditional procession of religious images from the local *cofradía's* meeting place to the event site. There was also a short presentation on the community's historic struggle to defend its territory. A key part of the day's events was when the Governor of Chiquimula signed and handed over the documents recognizing the community's rights to four parcels of communal lands in the municipality, an important step toward strengthening the community's collective rights.



- Journalist **Carlos Ernesto Choc** during his appearance on the program "*Voces Ciudadanas*." This project was organized by Stella Maris Church, in collaboration with the organization Guatemala, to create spaces for analysis, reflection, and dialogue on the national situation. In his presentation, Carlos discussed the problems related to mining that the community of El Estor, Izabal, faces, as well as the threat to journalists' right to freedom of expression.

3. 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.

On Sunday, June 21, we observed a **peaceful demonstration in defense of the University of San Carlos of Guatemala (USAC)**, students, faculty, alumni, workers, labor unions, peasant organizations, and indigenous communities participated. The protesters marched through the Historic Center and passed in front of the MP, the Congress of the Republic, and the CC—institutions the demonstrators identified as key players in the university crisis. During the march, they demanded an end to what they saw as a second case of fraud intended to illegally extend Walter Mazariegos's tenure as USAC's president, as well as respect for the rights of the university community. The inauguration of the new university president is scheduled for July 1. However, the legal battle remains ongoing.



4. 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.

As part of our engagement with the diplomatic corps and international organizations, this month we met with:

- Juan Antonio Frutos Goldaratz, Minister Counselor for Human Rights at the **Spanish Embassy in Guatemala**.
- Robertha Beltranena, Program Officer at the **Swiss Embassy in Guatemala**.

As part of our engagement with Guatemalan authorities, this month we met with officers from the **National Civil Police (PNC) in Cobán, Olopa, and Quezaltepeque**.

5. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA

This month we organized the following activities:



A **healing gathering** in Chiquimula, facilitated by TZK'AT, the Network of Ancestral Healers of Territorial Community Feminism from Iximulew. Twenty-six women human rights defenders from four organizations in the Ch'orti' region participated.



A **security workshop** attended by 24 people from 17 different organizations and 4 representatives from the diplomatic corps.

And **Popular Bulletin No. 17** is now available in **Q'eqchi'** on our website (<https://pbi-guatemala.org/es/multimedia/boletin-popular-en-qeqchi>).



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, PBI Guatemala's European Representative met with:

- Désirée Hermann, from the Permanent Representation of Sweden to the Latin America and Caribbean Group (COLAC) and the Human Rights Group (COHOM) of the **Council of the European Union**.
- Tomas Reyes Ortega, chair of COLAC.
- Luis Vilacha, assistant to MEP Ana Miranda, vice president of DLAT (Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly) and member of DEVE (Development Commission)
- Eva Nullens, human rights officer at the **Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**.

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.

GUATEMALA, 9 DE JUNIO DE 2026

ANTE EL DESISTIMIENTO DEL MINISTERIO PÚBLICO EN EL CASO CONTRA PERIODISTAS Y COLUMNISTAS DE EL PERIÓDICO

La Red Rompe el Miedo Guatemala (RRMG) recibe con satisfacción la **decisión del Ministerio Público de desistir de las acciones promovidas contra periodistas y columnistas de el Periódico**, por publicaciones realizadas en el ejercicio de su labor informativa.

Este caso **se convirtió en uno de los ejemplos más emblemáticos de la criminalización del periodismo en Guatemala**. Durante más de tres años, periodistas y columnistas **enfrentaron incertidumbre jurídica, desgaste emocional, afectaciones personales y profesionales e incluso el exilio**, como consecuencia de una investigación impulsada por la Fiscalía Especial contra la Impunidad (FECI), que pretendía trasladar al ámbito penal hechos relacionados con el ejercicio de la libertad de expresión.

El desistimiento de esta acción constituye un **reconocimiento implícito de que el derecho penal no puede utilizarse para perseguir a personas periodistas** ni para intimidar a quienes ejercen el derecho a informar y opinar sobre asuntos de interés público.

Sin embargo, la RRMG recuerda **que el daño ya fue causado**. Este proceso provocó miedo, autocensura, exilio forzado de periodistas, afectaciones económicas y un profundo deterioro de las garantías para el ejercicio de la libertad de expresión en Guatemala. Además, **formó parte de un patrón más amplio de criminalización contra periodistas, medios de comunicación y personas operadoras de justicia durante la administración encabezada por Consuelo Porras y por la FECI, dirigida por Rafael Curruchiche**.

La RRMG considera que el **desistimiento representa una oportunidad para que el Ministerio Público marque una ruptura** con prácticas que instrumentalizaron el sistema de justicia para perseguir voces críticas y que contribuyeron al deterioro de la confianza ciudadana en las instituciones encargadas de garantizar la legalidad y los derechos fundamentales.

Por ello, exhortamos a la **Corte de Constitucionalidad a resolver el expediente conforme a los estándares nacionales e internacionales de libertad de expresión** y a consolidar un **precedente que impida la utilización indebida del derecho penal** contra periodistas por publicaciones vinculadas a asuntos de interés público. Asimismo, **instamos al Ministerio Público a identificar a los y las culpables para ser juzgados y sancionados por incurrir en falsa denuncia**; así como revisar otros casos de criminalización contra periodistas que permanecen abiertos y a **adoptar medidas concretas para garantizar el acceso a la justicia** de quienes han sido víctimas de agresiones por ejercer su labor informativa.

La democracia requiere una prensa libre, crítica e independiente. Ninguna sociedad puede fortalecerse cuando informar se convierte en motivo de persecución.

Informar no es delito.



PRONUNCIAMIENTO

1 DE 1

The team of volunteers in PBI Guatemala is currently composed of Nelly Horvath (Hungary), Ericka Stephania López Mota (Mexico), María Moreno Hurtado (Spain), María Josefina Díaz Zunino (Argentina), Joseph Dotu (France), Alfonso Ochoa de Zabalegui (Spain) and Humberto Mendez (Mexico). .

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**GUATEMALA PROJECT
PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL**

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