



Monthly Information Package Guatemala

Number 276 - September 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.

Cifuentes Cano sentenced to 50 years in prison for forced disappearance¹

On September 17, 2026, more than 44 years after the crimes in question were committed and following 42 hearings held between May and September of this year, the Eighth Criminal Sentencing Court sentenced the ex-commander of the Special Operations Reaction Battalion (BROE), Juan Francisco Cifuentes Cano, to a total of 50 years in prison, without the possibility of commuting the sentence (25 years for each victim), for the forced disappearances of Luz Leticia Hernández Agustín and Ana María López Rodríguez. In addition, the court ruled that the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) must continue investigating other police and army officers who may have been involved in these events. The court did not find sufficient evidence to support the charges of crimes against humanity. Luz Leticia's sisters, who have continued the struggle that their parents, Valentina and Jorge, began, said they were satisfied with the verdict. However, they noted that the sentence seems minimal compared to the profound impact the disappearance has had on their family. They said, "Justice has finally been served for our sister, which also means something for the 45,000 people who were disappeared during the war in Guatemala."

The week after the ruling was handed down, the court held a hearing on dignified reparations, during which it ordered Cifuentes Cano to publicly apologize, publish the ruling and his apology in a widely circulated newspaper, and pay Q500,000 to each plaintiff for non-pecuniary damages. The court also ordered that a commemorative plaque be erected at the Polytechnic School and that the case be incorporated into Army and police training. However, the court rejected a motion to compel the convicted man to reveal where the victims' remains were located.

Judgment in the Rancho Bejuco Massacre Case²

High-Risk Court D found Nicolás Orrego Orrego guilty of murder and crimes against humanity in a special trial. Orrego was charged with the massacre of at least 25 people in the community of Rancho Bejuco, located in Santa Cruz El Chol, in the department of Baja Verapaz. The massacre took place on July 29, 1982, when Orrego was serving as a military commissioner. Due to his health, Nicolás Orrego Orrego will not serve his prison sentence at this time; he is currently subject to alternative measures and wears an electronic monitoring device. According to attorney Lucía Xiloj, "During the trial, three expert reports were presented—psychological, psychiatric, and neurological—establishing his cognitive decline, which requires special treatment that he cannot receive at home but only in a specialized hospital."

The massacre took place four months after Efraín Ríos Montt's coup against the government of Fernando Romeo Lucas García. The massacre victims, members of the Maya Achi people, were from Rabinal and had been displaced after surviving several massacres perpetrated in that municipality. The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), in its report *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, determined that genocide and

¹ This news story is based on PBI Guatemala's own observation of the court proceedings, carried out as part of its accompaniment of Luz Leticia's family.

² Ramón, S., [Tribunal responsabiliza a Nicolás Orrego de la masacre en Rancho Bejuco](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 21 Sep 2026.

crimes against humanity were committed in four regions of Guatemala; one of those regions is Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.

After lengthy process of criminalization and prosecution, former indigenous authorities from 48 Cantones of Totonicapán and Sololá have been acquitted

Former indigenous authorities, Luis Pacheco, Héctor Chaclán, Basilio Puac, and María Juana Elías Tzunun, and former indigenous deputy mayor of Sololá, Esteban Toc, were acquitted of charges of criminal conspiracy, criminal incitement, terrorism, obstruction of criminal proceedings, and obstruction of justice. Third Judge Mynor Moto closed the cases, in response to a request from the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime to dismiss the charges. The criminalization of the former indigenous authorities began during the first half of 2025 at the initiative of the MP, led by Consuelo Porras, and the Foundation Against Terrorism, following the indefinite national strike in defense of democracy and the 2023 election results, which was led by indigenous peoples. It was thanks to this mobilization that current president Bernardo Arévalo was able to take office.³

The ruling ordered the State of Guatemala, through the Office of the State's Attorney (PGN), to apologize for the persecution of the five indigenous leaders.⁴

However, despite this good news, there are continued reports of violations of the rights of indigenous peoples and human rights defenders. In late September, an international mission composed of organizations from Europe, South Africa, and Guatemala visited communities in Alta and Baja Verapaz and gathered testimonies from more than 30 ancestral authorities, women leaders, community leaders, and human rights defenders. The complaints documented include conflicts related to access to land, water, and territory; the lack of prior, free, and informed consultation; and the criminalization of community members for defending indigenous peoples' territories and collective rights. The mission conveyed its findings to state institutions and called for the state to guarantee communities' rights and ensure the necessary conditions so that indigenous authorities and human rights defenders can carry out their work without facing threats or any form of retaliation, such as the misuse of criminal proceedings to attack them.⁵

Chinautla: Floods highlight river's ongoing pollution

In September, heavy rains caused the Chinautla River to overflow, affecting homes, businesses, and schools. For the ancestral authorities of the Maya Poqomam people, this disaster is not only due to the rain. The flooding occurred in a watershed that has faced pollution, accumulated waste, and sand mining for years. The authorities point out that these conditions exacerbate the effects of the rains and have demanded that the government fulfill its commitments to restore and channel the Chinautla River watershed.⁶

The pollution of the Chinautla, Las Vacas, and Tzajá rivers is linked to different factors, including waste flowing from the city. This is in addition to the large-scale sand mining that has been taking place in the area for decades. Since 2004, there have been warnings about the effects the sand mining has had on the riverbed, including erosion and changes to the river's course. The situation has been the subject of legal proceedings. In June 2025, an injunctions court ordered the Municipality of Chinautla to adopt measures to address river pollution and ensure the participation of the Maya Poqomam community in decisions related to the environmental crisis.⁷ Nonetheless, the ruling's implementation has yet to yield concrete results.

The September floods have once again highlighted that Chinautla's environmental problems are not limited to an emergency caused by rainfall. For indigenous authorities, preventing such disasters requires addressing

³ Figueroa, K., «No somos una asociación ilícita. Los 48 Cantones tienen más de 200 años», caso Luis Pacheco y Héctor Chaclán, Agencia Ocote. 5 Aug 2026.

⁴ García, J., «Los 48 Cantones de Totonicapán no son terroristas»: así se cierra el caso contra líderes indígenas, Plaza Pública, 11 Sep 2026.

⁵ Sapalú, L., [Misión Internacional denuncia vulneraciones a los derechos de los pueblos indígenas en Alta y Baja Verapaz](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 25 Sep 2026.

⁶ Sapalú, L., [Autoridades ancestrales de Chinautla le recuerdan a Arévalo que prometió soluciones por el desbordamiento y contaminación del río](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 25 Sep 2026.

⁷ Kristhal, F., [Guatemala: sentencia ambiental a favor del pueblo maya poqomam no frena la contaminación ni repara los daños en Chinautla](#), Mongabay, 28 Jul 2026.

the structural causes of the watershed's deterioration and ensuring that the Maya Poqomam people's territory and rights are protected.

Claudia González accuses Judge Jimi Bremer of “arbitrary actions” in her case

In late August of this year, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared the 2023 detention and 82-day imprisonment of attorney Claudia González arbitrary, calling on the State of Guatemala to conduct a thorough and independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding these events and to take “appropriate measures against those responsible for the violation of her rights.”⁸

Based on this finding, in September, the attorney and former head of the now-defunct International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) filed a request before the Judicial Branch's (OJ) Criminal Proceedings Division to lift Judge Jimi Bremer's immunity, after accusing him of potentially committing human rights violations. González seeks to ensure that, once the judge's immunity from prosecution is lifted, he can be investigated for the crimes of breach of legal duty, abuse of authority, failure to fulfill official duties, malicious delays, and denial of justice. Some of the issues the complaint cites include the number of times hearings to resolve her case were delayed, as well as the claim that the crime she was accused of could not be applied to her because she was not a public official. The complaint also challenges the rejection of all exculpatory evidence, which, she stated, left her unable to mount a defense during the proceedings.⁹

More adjournments in the trial of former anti-corruption prosecutor Stuardo Campo

The intermediate stage hearing against former anti-corruption prosecutor Stuardo Campo—in which the Public Prosecutor's Office requested that he be sent to trial for an alleged failure to fulfill official duties in his investigation of the Zolic case—was postponed for the fifteenth time, preventing the trial from moving forward and resolving the case against Campo and two other defendants. This time, one of the defendants in the case, Juan Fernando Sáenz, submitted a request to be excused from the proceedings, prompting Judge Víctor Cruz to postpone the hearing once again until October 1. The intermediate stage hearing against Campo began on February 26, following 10 adjournments ordered by Judge Cruz, mainly because Campo's accusers filed various excuses for not attending the hearings.¹⁰

⁸ Consejo de Derechos Humanos: Grupo de Trabajo sobre la Detención Arbitraria, [Opiniones aprobadas por el Grupo de Trabajo sobre la Detención Arbitraria en su 105º período de sesiones, 23 de marzo a 1 de abril 2026](#), OHCHR, 28 Aug 2026.

⁹ Osegueda, S., [Claudia González denuncia al juez Jimi Bremer; alega “arbitrariedades” en su proceso](#), La Hora, 21 Sep 2026.

¹⁰ Osegueda, S., [Proceso contra exfiscal anticorrupción Stuardo Campo suma más suspensiones que audiencias realizadas](#), La Hora, 25 Sep 2026.

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 the sentencing hearing in the case regarding the forced disappearances of Luz Leticia Hernández Agustín and Ana María López Rodríguez. Juan Francisco Cifuentes Cano, commander of the Special Operations Reaction Battalion (BROE) at the time of the disappearances, was sentenced to 50 years in prison, without the possibility of commuting the sentence. We also provided accompaniment at the hearing on measures for dignified reparations.
- The **Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)** to a ruling on an injunction in the CREOMPAZ case. The accused sought to challenge whether the judge presiding over the case had the authority to order the pretrial detention of one of the defendants. The MP, the BDH, the Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA), and other organizations explained that a similar injunction had already been dismissed by the Constitutional Court (CC). Thus, it was concluded that the defendant was using the injunction as a tool to wear down the judicial system and obstruct its work.



We were also present at the start of the oral and public hearing in the 21N case against Dulce María Archila and Nanci Sinto, who are accused of destruction of cultural property. They are alleged to have spray-painted graffiti on the Congress building during an anti-corruption demonstration held on November 21, 2020. The BDH argued that the evidence presented by the Public Prosecutor's Office had been obtained unlawfully. Likewise, they defended Dulce María and Nanci's right to freedom of expression and demonstration.

- **FAMDEGUA** and BDH in an intermediate stage hearing of the case Diario Militar against Toribio Acevedo, Malfred Orlando Pérez, Edgar Virgilio de León and Alix Barillas, accused of the crimes of illegal detention, torture, forced disappearance, murder and sexual violence of approximately 195 people during the de facto government of General Óscar Humberto Mejía Víctores. At the beginning of the hearing, the lawyer of several plaintiffs asked for the suspension of the hearing because there is a legal recourse that required the Public Prosecutor's Office to appoint a new prosecutor's office for the case, because the human rights prosecutor's office that used to carry out the process in the hearings at the end of last year asked for the dismissal of crimes against these defendants. This action generated distrust in the plaintiffs, which is why in October 2025, through their lawyers, they asked to remove the human rights prosecutor's office on the grounds that it would not be able to act with the necessary impartiality in the process. The High Risk Court D in charge of Judge Abelina Cruz accepted the request and suspended the hearing and asked the MP to appoint a new prosecutor's office to appear at the next hearing on September 21; however, the hearing was again suspended.
- The **Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR)** during its anniversary celebrations. They celebrated the fact that, 25 years ago, 22 communities that had survived the scorched earth policy carried out between 1978 and 1985 in Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Rabinal, the Ixil Region, and the Ixcán decided to work together to seek justice.

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>

THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO LAND

This month, we accompanied the **Verapaz Union of Peasant Organizations (UVOC)** to roundtable discussions with the Presidential Commission for Conflict Resolution (COPRECON). At the meeting, David Maxena, a member of UVOC, sought to put an end to the legal uncertainty facing the community of Nueva Chintún. The Registry of Cadastral Information (RIC) has repeatedly promised to submit a report to resolve this situation; however, to date, it has failed to do so. Along with the situation in the Lajeb Kej community, these cases demonstrate the lack of effective responses to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

This month, we accompanied:

- The **Peaceful Resistance of the Poqomam People of Chinautla** to roundtable discussions they are holding with various municipal authorities in the department of Guatemala to follow up on efforts to restore the Las Vacas River, among other issues. The Resistance expressed concern about logging in the area and the construction of a new highway without proper consultation of the community.
- Carmelina Chocooj, from the **National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty (REDSAG)**, on her monthly visit to the Justice of the Peace in San Pedro Carchá, Alta Verapaz. Carmelina is a member of the community of Soledad Sayaxut, which is currently undergoing a land legalization



process with the National Institute for Agrarian Transformation (INTA). In 1994, INTA lost the property titles, and communities have been trying to return to their ancestral lands since that time. Several people have been criminalized due to a conflict with the Sam Aldana landowner family, which is a member of the Association for the Defense of Private Property. Indeed, Carmelina and her sister Estela are being criminalized and are facing legal proceedings on charges of disturbance of possession. Although the complaint against them was filed in 2020, the case has not moved forward, and they are required to sign in at the Cobán courthouse every 22 days.

- The **Maya Ch'orti' Council of Ancestral Indigenous Communities of San Juan Ermita** to its meeting with the National RIC and

the Departmental Government of Chiquimula. Members of the **Maya Ch'orti' Indigenous Council of Olopa, Chiquimula**, and the **Indigenous Community of San Francisco Quezaltepeque** also attended this meeting. Given the absence of the National RIC, the meeting focused on addressing issues related to comprehensive development for Indigenous peoples, including their inclusion in the State's social programs, as well as respect for and promotion of their culture, traditions, and identity.

We also accompanied them to a meeting with the Municipal Development Council (COMUDE). Given the



various instances of discrimination that the Council's leaders had faced because of their fight for the environment, they sought to call attention to their rights as indigenous peoples and bring urgent issues to the forefront, including ongoing deforestation in the area and the privatization of land to build tourist resorts as part of the Trifinio Plan.

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.



We observed the proceedings in the **legal process involving the extrajudicial executions of Milton Nelson Santamaría**, a Salvadoran and Canadian national, and **Eldin Leonel Choc Xi**, a Guatemalan national, **at the National Civil Police (PNC) station in San Andrés Itzapa**. According to the plaintiffs' attorneys, this is one of the first time a case of extrajudicial execution, that occurred after the end of the internal armed conflict, to go to trial. Seven local PNC officers—five men and two women—are charged in the case. The charges vary depending on the role each individual is alleged to have played and include extrajudicial execution, obstruction of criminal proceedings, abuse of authority, failure to fulfill official duties, refusal to provide assistance, failure to report a crime, and

failure to provide assistance. In addition, two firefighters were each sentenced to one and a half years in prison for covering up the events. According to the defense, one of the main reasons for these executions was that the victims were a couple and belonged to the LGBTIQ+ community.

On September 3, we observed the intermediate stage hearing in the **Conrado de la Cruz case**. The Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (ODHAG) is a joint plaintiff in the case of the forced disappearance of Filipino priest Conrado de la Cruz and catechist Herlindo Cifuentes, who were abducted by state security agents on May 1, 1980. The evidentiary hearing was suspended at the last minute. This is the fourth time a hearing in this case has been suspended this year.

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:

- Robertha de Beltranena, Aide and Program Officer in charge of Administrative Affairs at the **Swiss Embassy**.
- Kayla Polamalu, Second Secretary, and Iván Quiroz, Political Advisor at the **Embassy of New Zealand in Mexico**.

As part of our engagement with Guatemalan authorities, this month we met with:

- Shirley Espinosa, assistant head of the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, and Virginia Alejandra Rubio, international relations assistant at the **Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH)**.
- Lilian Moreno, head of the PNC **substation in San Julián (Nueva Chinautla)**.

5. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA

On September 24, we organized a **security and protection workshop for organizations focused on transitional justice, reparations, and historical memory**. The workshop was facilitated by Guatemalan experts in the field, and 13 women and 12 men from 13 different organizations participated.

Issue No. 55 of our biannual bulletin is now available on our website and contains the following articles: The Peaceful Resistance La Puya prevents the state's economic collapse; Seeds in dispute: the battle for food sovereignty in Guatemala; Women potters fighting for the rights of the Poqomam people in Chinautla. You can access it at the following link: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/sites/default/files/2026-10/B55ingl.pdf>



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:

- Camille Le Ho, Guatemala desk officer at the **European External Action Service**.
- Santiago Mondragón, head of election observation missions at the **Secretariat of the European Parliament**.
- Gonzalo Jorro Martínez, head of Latin American affairs at the Secretariat of the **European Parliament's (EP) Subcommittee on Human Rights**.
- Jurga Prokaite, delegate from the Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the **Council of the European Union's Working Group on Latin America (COLAC)**.
- Lisette Frandsen, delegate from the Permanent Representation of Denmark to the Council of the European Union's Working Group on Latin America (COLAC).
- Rita Grajeda, policy officer in the **Political Section of the Delegation of the European Union to Guatemala**, and Raphael Warolin, temporarily replacing the Guatemala desk at the **European External Action Service**.
- María Luisa Sevilla Andrada, assistant to Spanish MEP José Cepeda of the S&D political group.
- Annika Lotson Lopez, assistant to Spanish MEP Leire Pajín of the S&D political group.

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 Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala CONAVIGUA

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LA COORDINADORA NACIONAL DE VIUDAS DE GUATEMALA CONAVIGUA

**A sus 38 años de organización y lucha de las mujeres indígenas en la
búsqueda de la verdad, justicia y reparación, manteniendo viva la memoria
histórica para la construcción de la plenitud de vida.**

EXPRESAMOS:

Ante las energías del sagrado calendario invocamos a los Abuelos Lajuj B'atz, Julajuj E y Kab'lajuj Aj, para que guíen nuestros pasos para continuar con nuestra misión política, como mujeres indígenas de ser la voz de miles y millones de mujeres de los diversos territorios que han sido empobrecidos, marginados y excluidos por los sistemas de opresión, que se han expresado históricamente y que han fomentado la desigualdad social.

Conmemoramos y reafirmamos nuestra lucha histórica como mujeres indígenas por la defensa de los derechos individuales y colectivos de las mujeres, juventudes, la defensa de la Madre Tierra y los bienes comunes.

Años de historia, resistencia, persistencia, consecuentes con nuestros objetivos organizativos y políticos como mujeres organizadas desde los diversos territorios, con bases sólidas que a diario desde los diversos contextos aporta su granito de maíz para luchar por las transformaciones sociales y estructurales necesarias para alcanzar una vida digna, con justicia social para todas y todos.

Rendimos homenaje especial a nuestras compañeras que se nos han adelantado hacia la otra dimensión, sabemos que ellas nos siguen acompañando y honramos su legado en nuestra organización.

En el marco de nuestro 38 aniversario de lucha, manifestamos nuestra preocupación por el alto costo de la canasta básica que afecta principalmente la vida de las mujeres, porque somos las que a diario afrontamos y sufrimos las consecuencias de la precariedad de la vida. Así también, el aumento de pasaje del transporte público y del combustible, entre otros problemas sociales que afectan a todo el país y principalmente a la clase trabajadora de las áreas rurales.



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Animamos a las mujeres y jóvenes de CONAVIGUA a seguir trabajando y buscando a nuestros familiares detenidos y desaparecidos, a seguir el camino para erradicar el racismo, la exclusión, corrupción y la impunidad.

Tenemos derecho a la verdad y una reparación digna, a 30 años de la firma de los Acuerdos de Paz, seguimos las huellas de las mujeres y hombres que derramaron su sangre y por eso seguiremos dignificando su memoria y su historia hasta encontrarlos, porque en cada cementerio clandestino quedaron sembrados los ideales y las semillas de quienes creemos y apostamos a una nueva Guatemala plurinacional.

Ante la situación de precariedad que afronta la clase trabajadora, la criminalización, persecución y amenaza a los movimientos sociales, nos solidarizamos con las luchas y respaldamos las demandas de las autoridades ancestrales y exigimos a las autoridades competentes que atienden las demandas dignas y oportunas del pueblo de Ixim Ulew.

¡Por la Unidad y Dignidad de la Mujer!

CONAVIGUA, presente

Guatemala, 11 de septiembre del 2026

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), Humberto Méndez (Mexico), Mauricio Lozano Massés (Mexico), Zoë Quinney Smith (United Kingdom) and Julia Ezcurdia Sánchez (Spain).

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**GUATEMALA PROJECT
PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL**

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