



## Monthly Information Package Guatemala

Number 249 - June 2024

### 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.*

#### Guatemala commemorates National Day against Enforced Disappearances

In 2004, the Guatemalan congress established June 21 as the National Day against Enforced Disappearances. The Mutual Support Group (GAM) led the initiative that prompted this decision as they had been working for decades to demand an end to forced disappearances, the investigation, prosecution and conviction of those responsible and compensation for the families of the victims. June 21 is significant in the recent history of Guatemala, because on June 21, 1980 a group of 27 union and student leaders who had met at the headquarters of National Workers' Central (CNT) union in Guatemala City, were arrested and disappeared by agents from State security forces.<sup>1</sup> Collective forced disappearances were a counterinsurgency strategy widely used by the military dictatorships during the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC), with more than 45,000 victims of forced disappearance documented between 1960 and 1996, according to the report from the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), "Guatemala Memory of Silence."<sup>2</sup>

This year the Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights (COPADEH), commemorated the Day in an event that took place in Guatemala City, by paying tribute to Adriana Portillo Bartow for her tireless work in the search for her six missing relatives. She was a pioneer in denouncing the forced disappearances of minors and has dedicated her life to the search for three girls and three adults from her family, who disappeared on September 11, 1981 during the government of General Fernando Romeo Lucas García. This tribute honors not only the victims of forced disappearances, but also their families, whose tireless work and determination keeps alive the memory and hope for justice.<sup>3</sup>

Commemorative acts were also held in other departments around the country. In San Juan Comalapa, Chimaltenango, members of the National Coordinator of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) and the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) paid tribute to the memory of 172 murdered people, whose remains were exhumed between 2003 and 2005 in the former military detachment of Chimaltenango, now transformed into a memorial for the victims called "Landscapes of Memory". The history of the site, the processes of exhumation and identification of the victims and the transformation of the site into a memorial were shared with participants during the activity, while relatives of the disappeared persons narrated their stories and personal experiences.<sup>4</sup>

In other parts of the country, union, student, academic, human rights and citizen organizations joined the initiative by creating an extensive program aimed at rescuing the historical memory with civic, cultural and political actions. The activities culminated on Sunday, June 30 with a March of Memory for the Heroes, Heroines and Martyrs in Guatemala City.



<sup>1</sup> Rodríguez, L., [Adriana Portillo Bartow reconocida en el Día Nacional contra la Desaparición Forzada](#), Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias, 21.06.2024.

<sup>2</sup> Méndez, F., [Más de 45.000 personas desaparecidas en Guatemala](#), La Hora, 21.06.2024.

<sup>3</sup> Rodríguez, L., Op. Cit.

<sup>4</sup> Solano, J., [Familias de Comalapa conmemoran el Día Nacional contra la Desaparición Forzada](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 23.06.2024.

### Evictions violate fundamental rights and go against COPADEH's recommendation

An eviction, authorized by Judge Ricardo Isaías Caal Caal of the Criminal Court of First Instance of Alta Verapaz, was carried out in the community of San José El Tesoro (Cobán) on June 5. Almost 1,500 agents of the National Civil Police (PNC) were deployed in the community, accompanied by Ariel Hase, a councilor from Cobán. According to the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC), they used disproportionate force, burned and destroyed homes and possessions, killed animals and set fire to crops. These actions represent an attack on the rights to housing, shelter, protection, access to land and food security. The CUC also pointed out that constitutional rights and guarantees were violated in relation to the right of defense, since the eviction was not notified in a timely manner to those affected, nor were they allowed to remove their belongings.<sup>5</sup>

CUC asserted that the State of Guatemala has not respected international protocols for the protection of human rights in instances of evictions. In this regard, COPADEH issued a recent reminder to State agencies about the need to postpone evictions due to inclement weather. Oswaldo Samayoa, Executive Director of COPADEH, emphasized the importance of prioritizing human rights and stressed that "there are binding international treaties for Guatemala that establish that evictions must be postponed in cases of adverse weather conditions, with the aim of avoiding an aggravation of the vulnerabilities of certain populations, such as children, adolescents, women, the elderly and people with disabilities."<sup>6</sup> In his recent visit to the families evicted from the Tz'inté' farm, in the community of Santa Rosita, El Estor, Samayoa said that "the Executive cannot suspend the eviction in El Estor", because it is a court order, but that there is a possibility that the Presidency may create emergency protocols to benefit the families.<sup>7</sup>

The Community Council of the Highlands (CCDA), the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC), New Day and the Union of Peasant Organisations Las Verapaces (UVOC), held a press conference to denounce the complicity of the authorities and the judicial body of Alta Verapaz in evicting indigenous and peasant communities from their land.<sup>8</sup>

### Rainy season begins causing landslides, floods and alerts in the agricultural sector

The rains arrived a month late and with great force in Guatemala this year. According to the director of the National Institute of Seismology, Volcanology, Meteorology and Hydrology (INSIVUMEH), Edwin Rojas, the country can expect an increase of between 25% and 50% in above-average rainfall above, especially in the Southern Coast, the Caribbean, the Northern Transversal route, Petén and the Pacific region.<sup>9</sup>

In view of the increase in rainfall, which has been described by experts as a historic rainy season, for the second time this year the Presidency of the Republic convened members of Congress at the National Palace with the intention of declaring a state of emergency.<sup>10</sup>

The high temperatures recorded in May 2024 created ideal conditions for the formation of severe local storms, characterized by heavy rains, intense winds and, in some cases, hail. According to the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (CONRED), the 2024 rainy season has left 2,872,871 people affected, 4,954 flooded, 10 dead, 20 hospitalized and five injured. In addition, 264 roads have been affected, as well as 31 schools, 11 churches and 10 bridges, four of which were destroyed.<sup>11</sup>

One of the sectors that will be most affected by this situation is agriculture. For this reason, trade organizations and State institutions, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) have remained attentive to possible effects on crops. The Chamber of Agriculture have stated that they are analyzing possible effects of the rains in several regions. The regions of Petén, Alta Verapaz, Escuintla, Santa

<sup>5</sup> Prensa Comunitaria, [PNC es señalada de quemar viviendas y cultivos en desalojo de comunidad en Cobán](#), 08.06.2024.

<sup>6</sup> Rodríguez, L., [Copadeh recuerda a organismos del Estado que desalojos deben ser aplazados por inclemencias del tiempo](#), [Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias](#), Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias, 19.06.2024.

<sup>7</sup> Simón, F. y Bautista, J., [Copadeh: "No está en las manos del Ejecutivo suspender el desalojo en El Estor"](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 25.06.2024.

<sup>8</sup> Transmisión en vivo de la Conferencia de Prensa "El Consejo Campesino repudiamos la continúa política de criminalización en contra de los defensores y defensoras de los derechos humanos y la democracia en Guatemala", Facebook Comité de Unidad Campesina CUC, 11.06.2024.

<sup>9</sup> Álvarez, G., [La temporada de lluvias 2024 será histórica](#), TGW, 27.06.2024.

<sup>10</sup> Cuevas, D. y Montenegro, H., [Diputados confirman nuevo intento del presidente para conseguir un estado de Calamidad](#), Prensa Libre, 26.06.2024.

<sup>11</sup> Barrientos, M., [Lluvia en Guatemala continúa este 24 de junio por el paso de una onda del este](#), Prensa Libre, 24.06.2024; Nathalie, Q., [Incendios y deforestación aumentan el riesgo de deslaves en áreas afectadas por lluvias](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 17.06.2024.

Rosa, Jutiapa, Guatemala and Quetzaltenango, could face the most serious consequences, and basic grains, sugar cane, tomato, coffee, avocado and pineapple crops, among others, are at risk.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the excess rainfall could cause a rise in the price of fresh produce, due to damage to infrastructure such as the collapse in the Palín-Escuintla highway. The director of the Chamber of Commerce, Jorge Briz, pointed out that journeys which used to take two or three hours, can now take up to 20, and that the alternative routes around the collapsed road are also in a bad condition as a result of the heavy rains.<sup>13</sup>

### **Attorney General, former presidents and other high-ranking officials denounced before international court**

On June 5 2024, "peasant organizations and international intellectuals filed a complaint at the International Criminal Court [ICC] against former presidents Alejandro Giammattei Falla and Jimmy Morales; the Attorney General, Consuelo Porras; the head of the FECI [Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity], Rafael Curruchiche and prosecutor Cinthia Monterroso". The main charge they are accused of is the use of malicious prosecution as a crime against humanity. "This implies the intentional and serious deprivation of rights in a generalized and systematic manner, not only against journalists and judges, but also against prosecutors, lawyers, community leaders and students of the University of San Carlos de Guatemala."<sup>14</sup>

According Ramón Cadena, a lawyer and human rights defender, the reason why the plaintiffs have turned to an international court is to obtain sentences against the individuals rather than State of Guatemala, since "there are no guarantees at the national level to try these people because they benefit from a culture of impunity within the justice system."<sup>15</sup>

The response of the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) has been to request "the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to activate a red alert for the arrest of nine university students and people in exile", despite the fact that on "several occasions this organization has already rejected the MP's requests, and even asked them to refrain from doing so."<sup>16</sup>

## **2. ACCOMPANIMENTS<sup>17</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>18</sup>*

### **THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY**

This month we continue to accompany the **Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR)** to the hearings of the "Ixil Genocide" case against Manuel Benedicto Lucas García, former Chief of Staff of the Guatemalan Army and brother of former de-facto president Fernando Romeo Lucas García (1978-1982). We observed two hearings in the case, which continued with declarations from national and international experts, such as the renowned archivist Kate Doyle, and the presentation of testimonies. The testimonies were presented in digital format (they were recorded in 2010), since two of the witnesses could not attend in person due to health problems and the other two had already passed away.

<sup>12</sup> Santizo, J., [Sector agrícola, en estado de prevención](#), Diario de Centro América, 18.06.2024.

<sup>13</sup> Prensa Latina, [Daños en rutas de Guatemala por lluvias afecta comercio y alza costos](#), 24.06.2024.

<sup>14</sup> Prensa Comunitaria, [Denuncian a Consuelo Porras, Giammattei y Jimmy Morales por delitos de lesa humanidad](#), 06.06.2024.

<sup>15</sup> Montenegro, J.P., [Dos ex presidentes y tres fiscales denunciados ante la Corte Penal Internacional](#), Federación Guatemalteca de Escuelas Radiofónicas-FGER, 13.06.2024.

<sup>16</sup> Prensa Comunitaria, [MP pide ante la Interpol la detención de universitarios por el caso USAC](#), 18.06.2024.

<sup>17</sup> We maintained regular contact with accompanied organizations who are not specifically mentioned in this section, but there are no activities to highlight.

<sup>18</sup> See our website for general information on organizations and individuals we accompany: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/en/groups-and-individuals-currently-accompanied-pbi>

With respect to our accompaniment of the **Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)**, we attended the press conference they gave for the National Day against Enforced Disappearance. They stressed that Guatemala still owes a debt to the victims, demanded the judicial system to fulfill its role and the State of Guatemala to comply with national and international treaties. They also requested the opening of military archives and the approval of Law 3590, which would lead to the creation of a commission to search for disappeared persons.



As part of our accompaniment of the **Luz Leticia case**, we accompanied the family to court. On this occasion the defense for José Cifuentes Cano filed an injunction without notification and the hearing was suspended again.

This month we accompanied the **Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)** to four hearings of the Hogar Seguro case, all of them were part of the continuation of the public hearing.

### THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO LAND

In our accompaniment of the **TZK'AT Network of Ancestral Healer from Community Feminism**, we held a face-to-face update meeting with its members and accompanied them by telephone during their multiple activities.

In the Department of Chiquimula we met with the **indigenous community of San Francisco Quetzaltepeque** and with the **Maya Ch'orti Indigenous Council of Olopa**, who updated us on their activities in a meeting at the Cofradía San Francisco Conquistador. Despite continuing threats, they have had positive news, as they have managed to open spaces for dialogue with the government on land tenure, the environment, particularly the care of rivers and the fight against logging, and the right to free, prior and informed consultation.



In the department of Guatemala we met with **Multisector Chinautla** at their encampment. The clay mines continue to operate without a license, extracting earth and stone. The dumping of garbage in the Las Vacas River has not stopped, causing the pollution of its waters and putting the health of the communities at risk.



### DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

We continued our accompaniment of the **Community Council of the Highlands (CCDA) - Las Verapaces Region**. We provided accompaniment to the two coordinators during different proceedings that they carried out in the municipality and at the MP office in Cobán. We also observed a ceremony to hand over ceremonial rods and land registration of the Sajobché community, Alta Verapaz. In our visits to the territory, we held meetings with both coordinators, where we discussed several issues, including the worrying security situation they are experiencing, the continuous threats and risks of evictions, as

well as the different roles played by public agencies in the execution of the eviction orders and in guaranteeing the fundamental rights of the evicted people. We also addressed the delicate situation of the criminalized and imprisoned defenders, Jorge Coc Coc and Marcelino Xol Cucul, after their transfer to the penitentiary center of Puerto Barrios.

With respect to the **Union of Peasant Organizations Las Verapaces (UVOC)** we maintained our regular meetings with the general coordinator, Carlos Morales, and other members of the organization, to follow up with and update us on their security situation and their work in defense of access to land, especially in the context of the actions that UVOC is leading with other indigenous and campesino organizations. We also accompanied the criminalized defender David Maxena to the opening hearing in the repetition of his public trial. This case ended last year with a sentence in his favor, but the MP and the prosecuting company appealed it. Now, the parties opted to abide by the outcome of plea bargain. This means that David Maxena had to accept the charges against him and the rules of abstention proposed by the lawyer representing the agribusiness company (non-recidivism, non-conflict and respect for the agribusiness and its collaborators) for one year, after which the case will be closed definitively.

### 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 and international organizations present in Guatemala, this month we met with:

- Isabel MacDonald, Human Rights Officer at the **British Embassy**.
- Dacia Aragón, Program Officer at the **Organization of American States (OAS) in Guatemala**.
- Erick Gerardo Ulate Quesada, **Ambassador for Costa Rica**.
- Mónica Izaguirre, Political and Economic Officer and Press Officer at the **Canadian Embassy**.

In our dialogue with neighbouring embassies this month we met with:

- Yente Morsink, Second Secretary of the **Dutch Embassy in Costa Rica**.
- Alexander Hart-Smith, Second Secretary, and Iván Quiroz, Political Advisor of the **New Zealand Embassy in Mexico**.
- Clara Sauer, Political Advisor at the **Austrian Embassy in Mexico**.

With respect to our dialogue with Guatemalan authorities, this month we met with:

- Sergio Pinelo, **COPADEFH Officer in Cobán**.
- Luis Arriola, Officer from the **Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) in Cobán**.
- Maximiliano López, Deputy Commissioner of the 51st Police Station from the **PNC Department in Alta Verapaz (Cobán)**.
- Dilia Margarita Co Coy, **Governor of Alta Verapaz**.
- Oswaldo Samayoa, **Executive Director of COPADEFH**.

### 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.*

On June 22, as part of the **National Day Against Forced Disappearance**, we observed the **commemorative activities** organized by the National Coordinator of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) and the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) at **the Landscape of Memory**. This site was used a military detachment in the recent past and is located ten minutes from Comalapa (Chimaltenango), where some 220 skeletons were exhumed between 2003 and 2005, of which 86 were identified as corresponding to people who disappeared during the Internal Armed Conflict. Thanks to CONAVIGUA, this place ceased to be a clandestine cemetery in 2018 and become a place of Memory and Dignification of the victims.

On June 29, we observed **the Parade for Sexual Diversity and Gender Identity 2024** in Guatemala City. A few days before the parade, the lawyer Roberto Antonio Cano López filed an injunction before the Constitutional Court (CC) to prevent the parade, on the basis that it "contains immoral, sexual, depraved scenes, contrary to the moral and integral development of children, inducing child hypersexuality, with themes of early hominization." The CC granted the provisional injunction, though it did not prohibit the parade the court did impose restrictions including the prohibitions of acts that "violate the rights of children" and the exhortation "to those in charge and responsible for the protection of the physical and emotional integrity of children and adolescents."<sup>19</sup>



On June 30 we observed the **March of Memory organized by Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence H.I.J.O.S.** to celebrate life, struggle and ideas for a Guatemala with social justice. This march to honor the heroes, heroines and martyrs of the war was founded in 1999 in rejection of the Army Day, which is celebrated on the same date.

## 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 European Representative of the project this month met with:

- Karolien Kras, Guatemala desk at the **European External Action Service (EEAS)** and Juan José García Carreño, from the EEAS Human Rights Unit, responsible for human rights defenders and Central America.
- Iago Gil Aguado, delegate from **the permanent representation of Spain** to the COLAC Council working group, responsible for relations with Latin America and the COHOM Council working group and human rights.
- Sandra Hochstoeger, delegate from the **permanent representation of Austria** to the COLAC Council working group and COHOM Council.
- Yovo Panchev, delegate from the **permanent representation of Bulgaria** to the COLAC Council working group.
- Lianne Guerra Rondón, Political Officer at the Directorate General of the **International Partnership INTPA**.
- Jonathan Hathwell, Head of the Central America, Mexico and Caribbean Division at the European External Action Service (EEAS), Karolien Kras, desk Guatemala at the EEAS and Juan José García Carreño, from the EEAS Human Rights Unit.

The European Representative of the project also participated in the Forum for **Dialogue with Civil Society - Central America, organized by the European Commission.**

<sup>19</sup> Valdez, A., [Fallo de CC permite desfile del Orgullo LGBTIQ+ pero impone restricciones](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 28.06.2024.

## 6. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

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



**La Coordinación y Convergencia Nacional Maya Waqib' Kej  
repudia y condena los desalojos y asesinatos a defensores de Derechos Humanos  
y de la Madre Tierra.**

Rechazamos y condenamos los doce desalojos realizados durante el año 2024 de familias campesinas en todo el territorio nacional, siendo los dos últimos en la región Q'eqchi, contra 35 familias de la comunidad San José el Tesoro, Finca Chichoy, Cobán Alta Verapaz y de las familias de la comunidad Buena Vista, Tzinte en El Estor Izabal, el pasado 22 de mayo. Obligando a las familias a vivir a orillas de la carretera que conduce de El Estor a Río Dulce, a un costado de la comunidad Santa Rosita y con ello violentando los protocolos que protege a las personas cuando se aplican las medidas de desalojo

Desde ya rechazamos la orden de desalojo en contra de las familias de la comunidad Santa Rosita, también en El Estor, Izabal previsto para el 26 de junio del presente año.

Los hechos en contra de la vida de familias campesinas son a todas luces condenables, actos que los expresan el desprecio hacia la población por parte de sectores económicos en complicidad con el Ministerio Público, jueces corruptos que favorecen a conservadores y del Pacto de Corruptos.

Ante esta situación hacemos el llamado al gobierno de Bernardo Arévalo a velar por los intereses del pueblo, garantizando la vida digna de las familias afectadas, además exigimos un alto a los grupos oligárquicos y del crimen organizado que vulneran la vida de la población guatemalteca, en especial a las comunidades de Pueblos Indígenas que son las más vulnerable.

También exigimos el cumplimiento de los protocolos nacionales e internacionales de obligación del Estado de facilitar alberge, alimentación seguridad y el derecho a la educación de las niñas y niños, cuyos derechos han sido vulnerados en estos actos.

Con igual indignación condenamos los asesinatos del abogado José Alberto Domingo Montejo y de Marcelo Yaxón Pablo del Comité de Unidad Campesina CUC en atentado sufrido el pasado 5 de junio en el departamento de Escuintla, del cual también salió herido Gustavo Yaxón.

Hacemos el llamado a la comunidad Internacional a fijar su atención en las instituciones responsables de la investigación penal y aplicación de justicia para cumplir con su mandato constitucional, el cual han vulnerado en los últimos años.

Demandamos y exigimos respeto a la vida de las mujeres, las niñas, niños, jóvenes y ancianos, así como el cumplimiento de las leyes en materia de derechos humanos y derechos de los pueblos indígenas.

Iximulew, Lajuj E'  
**Guatemala 13 de junio 2024**



**The team of volunteers in PBI Guatemala is currently composed of** Amparo Terrón Salvador (Spain), Carlos Fernández Arrúe (Spain), Marina García Alacreu (Spain), Elisa de Oliveira Ribeiro (Brazil), Gisela Farell Reviejo (Spain), Leonie Malin Höher (Germany), Anna Morales Mateu (Spain), Ana Gabriela Ascarrunz Ponce (Bolivia), Sebastián Aguirre Orozco (Colombia) y David Félix Azemar (Spain).

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**GUATEMALA PROJECT  
PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL**

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