

Rights Action
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Guatemala: Organized Crime Linked to President, Vice-President and Government Officials. Global companies and investors do profitable business with them

“Since the U.S.-backed military coup in 1954 ousted the last government that could actually be called democratic, the Guatemalan State has been characterized by corruption and impunity, racism, repression and violence,” Grahame Russell told teleSUR. “Since that time, the ‘international community’ – other governments, global corporations, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, etc. – have profitably done business, decade after decade, with the corrupted regimes in power.”

Guatemalans Demand President, Vice President Resign Over Corruption Scandal

By Jill Repogle, <http://www.ticotimes.net/2015/04/25/guatemalans-demand-president-vice-president-resign-over-corruption-scandal>



(Aerial view of a protest in Guatemala City against President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti for the recent corruption case involving high-level officials, April 25, 2015. Carlos Alonzo/AFP)

Thousands of Guatemalans gathered in the country's capital on Saturday to demand the resignation of President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti following revelation of a [tax corruption scandal](#) involving top government officials — including Baldetti's private secretary.

Protesters yelled “Resign now,” blew whistles and banged pots and pans while demanding that the country’s top two officials leave their posts and turn themselves over to the courts.

“We don’t want the thieves to govern anymore,” said 70-year-old María Letona, who went to the protest with neighbors from an exclusive enclave of Guatemala City. “They see us as toys. It’s shameful what they’re doing to the people of Guatemala.”

Last week Guatemalan and international prosecutors announced they had issued arrest warrants for 22 people allegedly involved in a criminal network that took bribes in exchange for reduced customs duties, making millions off the foregone government revenue.

Among those arrested were the current and former heads of Guatemala’s tax administration, the president of national newspaper SigloXXI and Baldetti’s private secretary, Juan Carlos Monzón. Prosecutors say Monzón, who’s currently a fugitive, was the ringleader. It’s believed he could be hiding in Honduras.

Baldetti and Monzón were in Korea for a ceremony where Baldetti was awarded an honorary degree when prosecutors announced the arrest warrants. In a news conference upon her return, Baldetti said she had informed Monzón of the charges when she found out and told him to turn himself in. After that, she said, he disappeared.

Protesters on Saturday said Baldetti and President Pérez must have known about the criminal dealings, and many have accused Baldetti of tipping her private secretary off so he could flee. “Clearly we could see that Baldetti covered up Monzón’s escape,” Alejandro Rodríguez, a student leader at the public University of San Carlos, told AFP.

Armando González, a Catholic priest, was at the protest with a group of Franciscan nuns and friars holding white flags. “We want all politicians to see that when the people of Guatemala stand up it’s because we don’t want more corruption,” he said.

The protest was organized by a group of citizens via Facebook. More protests are expected in the coming days.

President Pérez, who was on an official trip in eastern Guatemala on Saturday, told journalists that he would not resign. He said his government initiated the investigation that brought the tax fraud ring to light. “I ask all Guatemalans to act sensibly,” Pérez said. “All have the right to express themselves but we must respect the institutions” that are carrying out the investigations.

Local news outlets reported that protesters remained in Guatemala City’s central plaza into the evening. Protests also took place in several other cities around the country on Saturday.

Guatemalan President Extends Mandate of UN Anti-Impunity Body

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Guatemalan-President-Extends-Mandate-of-UN-Anti-Impunity-Body-20150424-0023.html>

Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina announced Thursday that he is extending the mandate of the U.N's International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) for two years, following the recommendation of a judicial committee.

Perez's decision was hoped for, but not expected by civil society groups in the country, as the president had repeatedly expressed reservations about extending the commission, even opting for the appointment of a committee that would evaluate the CICIG's performance in the country.

"The current administration has shown no political will to root out impunity and has regularly and publically undermined the legitimacy of CICIG, going so far as to say it's presence is an attack on Guatemala's sovereignty," Bridget Brehen, director of the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) explained to teleSUR English. "It was surprising, although no coincidence, that he reversed his stance right after CICIG exposed the customs scandal, which reached all the way up to the vice presidency."

During a visit to Guatemala in early March, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden put the CICIG's mandate extension as a condition for the U.S. funding of a security plan against organized crime in the Northern Triangle, which also includes Honduras and El Salvador.

The CICIG unveiled tax-fraud and contraband scheme involving 22 public officials, including the secretary of Vice President Roxana Baldetti. "The recent customs scandal is likely to be only the beginning of corruption issues in other state institutions controlled by the current administration," added Brehen. "Last year there were significant concerns about the transparency and ethics of the judicial nomination process that cemented the administration's allies in key, high ranking positions. The presence of CICIG remains as essential now as it was when it was established in 2007."

Grahame Russell, director of Rights Action, a community development and environmental and human rights solidarity organization which does work in Guatemala, agreed that Perez Molina's surprising decision is likely related to the "public exposure" of the recent corruption scandal.

However, while Russell welcomed the decision and praised CICIG's role against impunity in the country, he warned about the difficulties the institution will face to properly complete its task. "Since the U.S.-backed military coup in 1954 ousted the last government that could actually be called democratic, the Guatemalan State has been characterized by corruption and impunity, racism, repression and violence," he told teleSUR. "And since that time, the 'international community' – other governments, global corporations, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, etc. – have profitably done business, decade after decade, with the corrupted regimes in power." But Russell concluded that corruption and impunity in Guatemala

are not a “national phenomena,” but rather symptomatic of an unjust international system.

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