

## Guatemalan Front Page News: Corruption, crime and impunity in all branches of government, military and economic elites

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... and ‘business-as-usual’ for the ‘international community’ - global companies and investors, the World Bank and IDB, the US and Canadian governments, the US military, etc, - that participates in and benefits from Guatemala’s endless corruption, organized crime and impunity. Read it and get back to chipping away with education, activism and supporting civil society organizations in Guatemala, and exposing and holding accountable the complicity of this ‘international community’.



(Jimmy Morales - president of Guatemala, leader of FCN party founded and backed by ex-military and economic elites – widely accused of being “corrupt and a thief”.)

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### Guatemala’s Democratic Crisis Point

By Anita Isaacs, September 6, 2017

<https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/09/06/opinion/guatemala-democracy-organized-crime.html?referer=http%3A%2F%2Fm.facebook.com>

HAVERTFORD, PA. — Guatemala is facing a moment of political reckoning. Last Sunday, the country woke to the news that President Jimmy Morales had expelled Iván Velásquez, the commissioner heading the United Nations panel charged with eradicating the country’s organized-crime networks. Within hours Guatemala’s Constitutional Court provisionally blocked Mr. Morales’s decree. Whether the president follows the court’s ruling will determine the future of Guatemala’s already fragile democracy.

The timing of Mr. Morales’s move is not accidental. At a news conference held hours earlier, Mr. Velásquez and Attorney General Thelma Aldana had asked Guatemala’s courts to initiate impeachment proceedings against the president for failing to report \$825,000 in illicit contributions to his 2015 electoral campaign. And within the coming weeks his brother and son are to be tried on corruption charges.

Mr. Morales’s actions represent more than a personal vendetta against the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, known by its initials in Spanish as CICIG, and its commissioner. There is

little daylight between the president and a group of shadowy former military officers, responsible for heinous war crimes and organized crime.

In 2015, after the previous president and vice president resigned under corruption allegations, they handpicked Mr. Morales, a political outsider and popular comedian, who ran a campaign under the slogan “No more corruption, no more thieves.”

The CICIG and the attorney general took Mr. Morales at his word. Assuming his support, they widened the scope of their corruption investigations, uncovering webs of organized crime permeating the electoral process, and implicating the business community and politicians, including members of Mr. Morales’s political party. Bankers, politicians and army officers increasingly crowd Guatemala’s jails.

One would think that an anti-corruption campaign would have broad support. But Mr. Morales has a coterie of allies. With a fifth of Congress currently facing impeachment proceedings and scores likely to follow suit, the nation’s political class has mostly lined up behind him. Its most powerful business organization issued a tepid response to Mr. Velásquez’s expulsion. The popular media, monopolized by a corrupt Mexican oligarch, is spreading fake news, whipping up popular frenzy and confusing a population that has scant access to the internet and alternative sources of information.

The army, itself immersed in organized crime, has likewise hedged its bets. It remains in the barracks for now, simultaneously endorsing the constitutional order and supporting its commander in chief.

That’s not to say that Mr. Velásquez and the commission lack support. Much of the same rainbow coalition of students, activists and indigenous communities that mobilized two years ago to demand the resignation of the president and vice president have taken to the streets in favor of the embattled commissioner. They have also filed court injunctions charging Mr. Morales with abusing his authority. A few business leaders have added their voices to the chorus. Key civil servants have taken a strong stand, and a cabinet member and several advisers have quit while others are fighting from within to contain Mr. Morales and preserve the constitutional order.

The international community has also been vocal in supporting Mr. Velásquez and the commission. Foreign ambassadors huddled in the commission compound in a display of solidarity with Mr. Velásquez. In an unusual show of bipartisanship from Washington, Republicans and Democrats issued unequivocal messages of support — after all, a Guatemala in chaos is fertile terrain for even more aggressive organized crime, potentially destabilizing a fragile region and driving more people north.

What comes next is anyone’s guess. If Mr. Morales wins, he and his allies in the government and organized crime would be emboldened to go further, emptying the jails and putting an end to reform efforts. But he’s not a fool; faced with enough backlash, he might beat a tactical retreat and forge a rapprochement with Mr. Velásquez that allows reform to go ahead.

While the standoff remains, neither Guatemala nor the international community can stand still. They need to act to protect the commissioner, the commission and the rule of law. Ms. Aldana and the ministry of justice should double down, taking current trials forward, continuing to root out corrupt practices and agitating for more judicial reforms. She has been pushing to remove Mr. Morales’s immunity from prosecution, and on Monday, Guatemala’s Supreme Court ruled that the matter should be decided by the country’s Congress.

Civil society needs to play a lieutenant’s role. Two years ago after the Justice Now movement ousted a corrupt president and vice president, it went into hibernation. Reawakened today, it needs to remain ever alert and pugnacious in pursuit of the justice it seeks, despite threats of repression.

The international community can play a critically important supporting role. The United Nations and others need to fight mightily for Mr. Velásquez, a fierce champion of justice who exemplifies everything the United Nations stands for, and for a commission that is one of their biggest success stories. It is hard to imagine how to replace Mr. Velásquez. There are few such fierce, principled and resolved champions of justice, and even fewer who would be interested in stepping in to lead a debilitated commission, under sustained attack and with just 19 months left in its mandate.

The American government has an opportunity to match its supportive rhetoric with concrete action. It can use its leverage to keep the army in the barracks and to lean heavily on recalcitrant elites. Military assistance can be cut. Wealthy Guatemalans and politicians who choose graft over justice can be denied the visas that permit their children to study in the United States, and they themselves to visit their second homes. If the commission's hands are tied, even temporarily, the United States can intensify its investigations of fishy financial transactions made by the same elites in the American banking system. The United States also has an opportunity to make good use of \$270 million earmarked for development and security assistance in Central America as part of the region's Plan for Prosperity.

No one element of the anti-corruption coalition can succeed alone. Playing on one another's strengths and capacities, they can collectively strengthen Guatemalan institutions to ensure that the violence and poverty that fuel crime and migration are mitigated, and that Guatemalan democracy pulls back from the brink.

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