

Further crackdown on rule of law in Guatemala

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/further-crackdown-on-rule-of-law-in-guatemala>

Guatemala's top anti-corruption prosecutor was forced to flee the country. This follows on threats against and forced ouster of other judges and public prosecutors; that follows upon the forced ouster of CICIG (the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala).

Guatemala continues to be a very profitable place to do business for global food-export, mining, hydro-electric energy and garment 'sweatshop' companies, and remains a staunch "democratic allie" of the U.S. and Canada.

Guatemala's Top Anti-Corruption Attorney Flees Country

El Faro English, July 25, 2021

<https://mailchi.mp/elfaro.net/el-faro-english-guatemala-top-attorney-flees-6213148?e=2943d15c91>

Last night, Juan Francisco Sandoval, a leading Guatemalan prosecutor who the U.S. State Department labeled an "anti-corruption champion" [<https://elfaro.net/en/202106/centroamerica/25580/Guatemala>] was ousted from the top spot of the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECI) by attorney general Consuelo Porras. Immediately after speaking with the international press late into Friday night, Sandoval, escorted by the ambassador of Sweden, fled the country to El Salvador.

The FECI, the most independent wing of the Public Prosecutor's Office, is widely considered the last bastion of anti-corruption efforts [in a judicial system increasingly aligned with President Alejandro Giammattei](#).

Sandoval is the latest judge or public prosecutor — most recently, [former chief magistrate of the Constitutional Court Gloria Porras earlier this year](#) — to abruptly flee the country amid intensifying persecution or removal from office.

"The decision taken by Madam Attorney General today hasn't taken me by surprise," Sandoval told a packed press room at the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office late Friday night. "I knew she was planning something for months, but in recent days the details, planning, and execution of the plan were accelerated because of what we were working on."

Corruption investigations into Presidents

Under Sandoval, the FECI has prosecuted dozens of high-level officials for corruption in government and the private sector, including the case that sent former president Otto Pérez Molina to prison in 2015 for customs fraud.

As a result of this work, Sandoval and the FECI were subject to at least 55 lawsuits from advocacy groups [with close ties to the ruling right wing and Guatemalan military](https://elfaro.net/en/202106/centroamerica/25580/Guatemala) [https://elfaro.net/en/202106/centroamerica/25580/Guatemala]. These suits include ongoing efforts to dismantle the FECI entirely.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights awarded precautionary measures to Sandoval and his FECI colleagues in April due to obstruction of his work and death threats tied to investigations of extrajudicial killings and torture committed by security forces in 2006 within the prison system.

President Alejandro Giammattei, then director of prisons, spent ten months in jail in 2010 for orchestrating the operation, but a court closed the case citing lack of evidence.

Sandoval said in the Friday press conference that he feared for the safety and employment of his family and FECI colleagues. He announced he would appeal his removal and argued that his labor rights had been violated through an “arbitrary” firing. Attorney General Porras, meanwhile, was light on details in announcing his removal, citing “the imminent lack of trust in the relationship.”

The United States immediately reached out to him following the announcement, Sandoval stated during the press conference. Julie Chung, the Acting Assistant for the U.S. State Department’s Western Hemisphere’s Affairs, referred to the move on Twitter as a “significant setback to the rule of law.” Rep. Albio Sires (D-NJ) more forcefully, called it “a lethal blow to the fight against corruption.”

Top National Security Council official Juan González quipped: “I don’t know what game Attorney General Consuelo Porras is playing, but with each passing day it’s clearer that it’s not the rule of law.”

Guatemala City could be in for a long weekend of protests. As Sandoval prepared to speak at a press conference Friday night, Guatemalans congregated outside the building and railed against the attorney general. The scene was tense, with protesters calling the director of the National Civil Police, José Antonio Tzubán, a “murderer” and blocking his entry to the press conference. Before exiting the building, Sandoval briefly emerged to the balcony to greet a roaring crowd.

In a recent interview

[https://elfaro.net/en/202107/centroamerica/25605/%E2%80%9CIt%E2%80%99s-Hard-to-Find-an-Honest-Judge-in-Guatemala-Now%E2%80%9D.htm] with El Faro’s Roman Gressier, Guatemalan human rights defender Helen Mack called out the country’s justice system as “a

tool of persecution” against independent judges, prosecutors, and anti-corruption advocates, citing Sandoval as a prime example.

“Today I’m the latest in a chain of prosecutors who have suffered the consequences of seeking the truth and justice,” Sandoval told the press Friday night. “I’m not the first, nor, unfortunately, am I the last.”

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