

Guatemala Election Watch #39

Indigenous democracy defender assassinated

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/indigenous-democracy-defender-assassinated>

**Day 29 of nationwide protests against corrupt government officials
trying to overturn August 20, 2023 election results**

- Below: 2 Prensa Comunitaria articles

Since June 26, 2023, the repressive Pacto de Corruptos ('Covenant of the Corrupt') government of Guatemala –longtime “democratic allie” of U.S., Canada, E.U., World Bank and transnational corporations– has been trying to block or overthrow the 2023 election results.

The first Prensa Comunitaria article documents targeted killing of Noe Garcia, a Xinka democracy defender who was also involved in years of land-rights-environmental defense work, resisting illegal mining interests of Pan American Silver (formerly Tahoe Resources).

The second article documents the leadership role in the democracy defense struggle of the majority Indigenous peoples, the most impoverished and exploited sector of the overall population.

**2 months, 14 days until Jan.14, 2024 transfer of power
Stay tuned ... This is not over**

Xinka Leader and Human Rights Defender Murdered

October 29, 2023

<https://prensacomunitaria.org/2023/10/asesinan-a-dirigente-xinka-y-defensor-de-derechos-humanos/>

The Parliament of the Xinka People of Guatemala reported that Noé Gómez Barrera, 65 years old, was murdered this Saturday, October 28 in Jutiapa. Noé Gómez Barrera was a leader of his community and a human rights defender.

Members and neighbors of the Xinka People reported that Gómez Barrera was a well-liked person in the sector known as El Caulote, department of Jutiapa. According to several local media reports, the Xinka Pueblo member was the one who organized the villagers who

voluntarily participated in the peaceful demonstrations on the highways of that department during the Indefinite National Strike.

The Jutiapa Volunteer Rescue Unit and the Departmental Municipal Fire Department reported that the deceased had several gunshot wounds, and although they tried to resuscitate him, their efforts were in vain.

The Xinka People, in a communiqué, repudiated the murder of the Xinka leader and human rights defender, and demanded that the authorities investigate the incident. They also demanded "no more criminalization or violence against Xinka leaders and human rights defenders".

Indigenous peoples steadfast in the struggle for democracy

On October 2, the Indefinite National Strike began with a series of peaceful demonstrations on highways, derived from the rejection of the actions of the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) against the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE).

Thousands of citizens, collectives and social organizations joined the social movements demanding the resignation of the Attorney General, María Consuelo Porras; the head of the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI), Rafael Curruchiche; the regional prosecutor Cinthia Monterroso and the judge Fredy Orellana.

The National Strike: A megaphone of an unequal, impoverished country with no opportunities

By Paolina Albani, October 27, 2023

<https://prensacomunitaria.org/2023/10/el-paro-nacional-el-megafono-de-un-pais-desigual-empobrecido-y-sin-opportunidades>

The streets have been the stage where, for 25 days, ancestral voices and native peoples have coexisted under the same objective: to obtain the resignation of prosecutors Consuelo Porras, Rafael Curruchiche, Cinthya Monterroso, Judge Fredy Orellana and President Alejandro Giammattei himself, accused of belonging to a corruption structure that struck a blow to the general elections.

But they have also become safe spaces and megaphones in favor of freedom of expression, culture, social protest against state neglect, inequality, poverty, racism, and lack of opportunities for development.

The ancestral peoples are behind the spark of the national strike. They want social justice for themselves and for their children and grandchildren, and as the days go by, they have made it evident that the governments have abandoned education, health, employment and more, at the expense of corruption.

This has been the message of several community members, such as Juventina López, representative of the Association of Women of Retalhuleu. On October 25, she said that poverty has been an imposition of the corrupt and is one of the motivations of the populations in resistance: "They give education to their dogs to take care of them, but they do not give education to the children".

Days before, on October 16, a Mayan Mam leader said in Cuatro Caminos, Totonicapán, that "families and communities are organized with their community authority to improve education, health and nutrition of children. In these communities the maternal mortality rate is high," and the cause of this is corruption.

David Saloj, Indigenous authority of Sololá, said that the people participating in the strike "risk their wellbeing and their economy, and they do it to try to recover full access to rights such as health and education".

On the morning of the 26th, in front of the headquarters of the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) in Guatemala City, Saloj also pointed out that the mobilizations are a common struggle to "recover the little democracy we have left, freedom, rights and dignity".

Although the ancestral peoples "have moved forward despite the lack of education, despite the lack of health and medicine... There is a lot of corruption in Guatemala. That is why we are here, and we will not leave until the government does its job," he said.

Saloj, who has been one of the few ancestral authorities who has given statements to the press, has assured that the culture of Sololá is justice and, for this reason, they have been in front of the Public Prosecutor's Office for 25 days to fight for democracy. "We are not here to beg. We demand justice and that the laws be complied with. We want victory. We are not strolling, we come for an objective. We are here fighting for our right," said the indigenous mayor.

"There have been acts of corruption in Guatemala, but they have not wanted to do anything. They have forgotten about a people who are crying out for justice.... . It is not that we are rebels, that we have nothing to do, there is much to do. They hide their hand to pursue corruption and impunity, and that has allowed us to have a stranded Guatemala, submerged in an economic, political and justice crisis," said Edgar Tuy, trustee of the Indigenous Mayoralty of Sololá. [...]

Sololá and the new strategy to pressure the government

Saloj caught the attention of the people in front of the MP this October 25, when he criticized those who come without being organized. "It's fine that they come one day, but we want to see their organization. Some say they are in the struggle, but they only come to see, to take photo, but that is not right, because we are fighting for democracy," he noted.

He added: "What is the fear for not going out to the streets, don't they see the injustice that is happening? They call us rebellious people, but we do work to correct the injustice in our towns.

And the fact is that the people behind the mobilizations, especially the people of Sololá, have changed their strategy to increase pressure on the government.

After 20 days of the national strike, the ancestral authorities appeared at a press conference and announced that as of Tuesday, October 24, they would resume the seizure of the highways that cross the department, (Las Trampas, Los Encuentros, La Cuchilla, entrance to San Juan Argueta and Km. 148, entrance to the route of the lagoons, among others).

This came after they granted "three days of grace" or a truce to the government, in which the Executive refused to remove the officials accused of having carried out a coup in the general elections.

Other measures implemented by Sololá have been the closing of businesses and stores, while groups are organized in caravans to travel to the capital and support the strike in front of the MP of Gerona.

Meanwhile, neighbors in Santiago Atitlán have been collecting signatures to attach them to a memorial to be delivered this Friday, October 27, to the Presidential House and Congress, where they demand the departure of Porras, Curruchiche, Monterroso and Orellana. They also demand the urgent national approval of the reform to the Organic Law of the Public Prosecutor's Office, according to the ancestral authorities.

The reform is to enable President Giammattei to fire the Attorney General, after in 2016, the Congress shielded the head of the MP with the reform to that law (Decree 18-2016) which refers that only the head of the MP can be removed "for the commission of an intentional crime".

"We will look for them wherever they are"

This Wednesday 25, it was expected that the initiative to reform the Law of the MP could be known in Congress, but of 160 deputies only about 40 went to the chamber. For the authorities of Sololá, the non-attendance of the parliamentarians is a symptom that the government is blocking them because they do not know how to respond to the people "who put them to govern". "For that reason, we have to stand up. We have to demand. If possible, we will go and look for them wherever they are", said Saloj.

An action that would not be unprecedented if one takes into account that, on other occasions, the peaceful demonstrations of the strike have been installed outside the residence of President Giammattei in zone 14.

Electoral coup d'etat: 'Death by a 1000 cuts'

It is impossible to keep up with the 'death by a 1000 cuts' attacks being carried out by the 'covenant of the corrupt' government and allies against the electoral victory of President-elect Bernardo Arevalo and VP-elect Karin Herrera of the Semilla Party.

Rights Action calls for Americans and Canadians to keep sharing these informations widely (including media outlets), and to contact your Senators, Members of Congress and Parliamentarian, urge them to publicly support the Semilla Party and President-elect Bernardo Arevalo and VP-elect Karin Herrera, and to support calls for the main coup plotters to resign: Attorney General Consuelo Porras, special prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche, Judge Fredy Orellana.

- U.S. Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact>
- U.S. House: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Canadian Parliament: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

More information

- Rights Action's "Guatemala Election Watch" alerts (www.rightsaction.org/emails)
- NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with People of Guatemala): www.nisgua.org; https://twitter.com/NISGUA_Guate
- GHRC (Guatemalan Human Rights Commission): www.ghrc-usa.org; <https://twitter.com/GHRCUSA>
- Breaking the Silence: www.breakingthesilenceblog.com, https://twitter.com/BTS_MG
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