

Lica. María Consuelo Porras Argueta
Attorney General of Guatemala
15 avenida 15-16 zona 1, Barrio Gerona
Ciudad Guatemala, Guatemala
via email: fiscalgeneralmp@gmail.com

November 24, 2020

Dear Attorney General Porras:

We are distressed at the excessive force and brutality that the National Civil Police (PNC) used against demonstrators and journalists at a primarily peaceful protest at the Constitutional Plaza in Guatemala City on November 21.


More than 500,000 people took to the streets on November 21 across Guatemala, including at least two demonstrations in Guatemala City. The demonstrations gained international attention when some of the demonstrators broke into the Congress building and set one office afire and tossed rocks at the police. The BBC reported that, despite this particular incident, "the bulk of Saturday's demonstrations...were peaceful." In retaliation, police used tear gas and nightsticks to push demonstrators back, not only at the demonstration outside the Congress building but also at the much larger protest in front of the National Palace.

Guatemalan citizens poured into the streets to call for a rejection of the general budget for 2021 that the Congress passed on November 18 without any in-depth discussion. Most of the funding is for infrastructure connected with big business. The new budget substantially reduces spending on education and social programs (such as those to combat chronic malnutrition), withdraws funds from the health sector in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and reduces the budget of the judiciary and the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman. At the same time, there were increases for lawmakers' stipends for meals and other expenses.

According to Amnesty International, the PNC made unnecessary and indiscriminate use of tear gas and water cannons against people who were peacefully gathered or walking in the street. There were at least 43 recorded arrests of students, human rights activists, and journalists. When observing recorded images of police beatings of those arrested and of journalists, Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas director at Amnesty International, stated: "It is clear that the Guatemalan authorities have violated international standards on the use of force, and have attacked the population's right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly."

We support the demands of Amnesty International: "that the Public Prosecutor's Office conduct a prompt, thorough and independent investigation into the excessive use of force by police during the demonstrations, and that the government ensure that the population is able to exercise its right to raise its voice without fear of reprisal." Furthermore, we echo the call made by Jordán Rodas Andrade, Guatemala's ombudsman for human rights: "Refrain from using these acts of provocation and vandalism to justify the persecution of journalists and human rights defenders, and criminalize the legitimate demonstration of citizens."

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators


Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Sr. Guillermo Castillo Reyes, Vice President of the Republic of Guatemala ~ via email
Licda. Hilda Pineda, Prosecutor of the Human Rights Section of the Public Ministry ~ via email
Lic. Augusto Jordán Rodas Andrade, Procurador de los Derechos Humanos de Guatemala ~ via email
Alfonso José Quiñónez Lemus, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ via email, US mail
IAHCR: Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
OACNUDH: Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala ~ via email
US State Department: Guatemala Desk ~ via email
US State Department: William Popp, Ambassador of the US to Guatemala, c/o of Mary Nameth, human rights officer ~ via email
NISGUA ~ via email
Guatemala Human Rights Commission-USA ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: