

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America

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Lic. José Alejandro Córdoba

Procurador de los Derechos Humanos

12 avenida 12-54, zona 1. Ciudad de Guatemala

December 22, 2022

Dear Procurador Córdoba:

Former prosecutor **Virginia Laparra**, who was head of the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI) in Quetzaltenango, has been unjustly imprisoned for more than nine months as a result of her investigative work on corruption cases in Guatemala and could face a sentence of up to nine years. We are writing for her immediate and unconditional release.

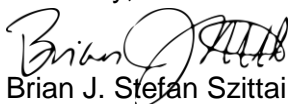
As part of the FECI, Virginia Laparra led investigations into corruption and large-scale crime. The criminal prosecution against her began in 2018, after having reported to the Board Disciplinary of the Judicial Branch possible inappropriate conduct by a judge accused of leaking confidential information on a case in which he was working. In retaliation, this same judge filed two criminal complaints against her: in July 2018 in Quetzaltenango and in August 2019 in Guatemala City. Since then, the former prosecutor has had to defend herself simultaneously in two parallel processes initiated by the same plaintiff, despite the fact that they relate to the same events. Authorities arrested Virginia Laparra on February 23, 2022 as she left her job in Quezaltenango, and since then she has been unfairly held in preventive detention.

"After a thorough review of the criminal file, we have verified that the accusation against former prosecutor Virginia Laparra presents serious deficiencies, in addition to multiple irregularities in the handling of the case. Not only is there no solid evidence that she has committed any crime, but it is clear that the reasons indicated by the court for rejecting her requests to continue the process in freedom are arbitrary," said Erika Guevara-Rosas, director for the Americas at Amnesty International.

We join with Amnesty International in expressing deep concern about these deficiencies and irregularities in the process against Virginia Laparra, which include the lack of substantiation of the alleged illegal act, the criminal prosecution against the ex-prosecutor for the same facts before two different judges, the instrumentalization of the criminal process to keep her deprived of liberty without a well-founded reason, and the court in charge of the case unjustifiably exceeding the deadline for taking her first statement and denying her requests to continue her trial at liberty on arbitrary grounds, amongst others.

Virginia Laparra has suffered an egregious violation of the rights to due process and a fair trial. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of Virginia Laparra after an unjust detention of more than nine months.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators



Christine Stonebraker Martinez

copies: Licda. María Consuelo Porras Argueta, Attorney General of Guatemala ~ via email
Alfonso José Quiñónez Lemus, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ email, US mail
IACHR: Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
OACNUDH: Mika Kanervuori, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (OACNUDH) ~ via email
US State Department: William Popp, US Ambassador to Guatemala; Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC: Doug Choi, Moises Mendoza ~ vial email
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Brown, 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: