



InterReligious Task Force on Central America
3606 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44113

tel: 216.961.0003 fax: 216.961.0002 e-mail: irtf@irtfcleveland.org

US House Committee on Foreign Affairs – Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere

US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

July 26, 2023

Dear Committee members:

We urge you to speak out against the unconstitutional proceedings regarding the upcoming presidential runoff election in Guatemala. Please amplify and echo the statements of Assistant Secretary of State Brian Nichols who, over the past two days, has said that the runoff election scheduled for August 20 should be allowed to take place "without interference or harassment of the candidates or political parties."

The initial election held on June 25 resulted in two top candidates heading to the runoff: Sandra Torres and Bernardo Arévalo. Although no concerns about the integrity of the election were raised by the 500 international election observers, nine political parties challenged the results. The Constitutional Court, although it lacked jurisdiction, ruled that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) would have to suspend the official release of the first-round results. The TSE resisted.

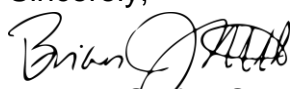
Since then, some big players in the government have been persecuting both the TSE and candidate Bernardo Arévalo. Upon the orders of Prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche, Judge Fredy Orellana (who is among 46 individuals from Guatemala on the US State Department's Engel Section 353 List of Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors) directed the TSE to disqualify Arévalo's Semilla Party; the TSE did not comply. In response, judicial agents have twice raided the TSE, and sought to arrest a functionary there. On July 21 they raided the headquarters of the Semilla Party in Guatemala City. The Public Ministry (Ministerio Público) sought to suspend the party from participating in the election runoff, but the Constitutional Court legally annulled its request.

The controversy around the elections is taking place in the broader context of chronic corruption in Guatemala. At great risk, news reporters, staff at non-governmental organizations, and now-exiled or imprisoned prosecutors have documented corrupt actions by hundreds of Guatemalan officials, criminal organizations, and business people. This corruption includes misappropriating state assets, bribery, corruption in government contracts and the extraction of natural resources. In addition, public officials working for the most powerful government officials have persecuted, falsely imprisoned, and exiled prosecutors, judges, human rights activists, and journalists who have tried to expose illegal activity by high-level government officials.

We urge you to support the Guatemalan people and their struggle for democracy and rule of law by

- issuing a statement that it is vital for the runoff election to be held without interference or harassment by officials of the Guatemalan government
- suspending US funding of the Guatemalan military and police, including International Military Education and Training funds, as the military and police are the enforcers of this increasingly corrupt state of Guatemala.
- withholding Development Finance Corporation funding for projects in Guatemala, and voting against loans to Guatemala in multilateral lending institutions.
- applying targeted Global Magnitsky Act financial sanctions to individuals placed on the Engel list for misappropriating state assets and engaging in significant corruption
- expanding visa and financial sanctions on corrupt economic elites who are profiting from government corruption
- strengthening regional collaboration to investigate organized crime and drug trafficking, which now operate with state support and collusion from private businesses, undermining well-being and social peace in Central America.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators



Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Licda. María Consuelo Porras Argueta, Attorney General / Fiscal General de la República ~ via email
Lic. José Alejandro Córdova Herrera, Procurador de Derechos Humanos/Human Rights Ombudsman ~ 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 Kanervavuori, 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 ~ via email
US State Department: Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC: Doug Choi, Moises Mendoza ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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