

IRTF

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

Ambassador Alfonso José Quiñónez Lemus
Embassy of Guatemala
2220 R St. NW.
Washington, DC 20008

September 24, 2023

Dear Ambassador Quiñónez:

We write to you today out of grave concern for **Claudia González Orellana**, the former lead prosecutor with the International Commission Against Impunity (CICG) who has been unjustly imprisoned by the state of Guatemala for weeks.

On August 28, 2023, Claudia González Orellana was arrested on the grounds of “abuse of authority” by the Internal Affairs Prosecutor’s Office of the Public Ministry (MP). Nine days after her arrest, the case brought against her was declared “under reserve,” preventing public access to her proceedings, which is a direct violation of due process. After a long, unjustifiable, and illegal three-week delay in holding her first public hearing, during which she was still in jail, on September 22 Judge Jimi Bremer denied her freedom for at least three months longer.


The Public Ministry of Guatemala continues to act arbitrarily and criminalize Claudia González’s law practice without any legal basis; this is as an act of intimidation and retaliation against attorney González for doing her job. Claudia González is a highly respected attorney. In April 2023 she was recognized in the Netherlands by the organization “Lawyers for Lawyers” with an award given to legal professionals who face high risk due to the work that they do. She is currently in charge of the criminal defense of at least nine lawyers who worked on high-profile corruption cases. Her imprisonment has hindered these cases, affecting these lawyers’ right of defense.

This imprisonment of Claudia González is just the latest chapter in a string of attacks on democracy and human rights in Guatemala. Officials at high levels of the government have been persecuting judges, lawyers, and prosecutors who work to defend human rights as part of their “death by a hundred cuts” strategy. The president-elect, Bernardo Arevalo, has denounced plots for a coup. It is also concerning that the policy of selective prosecution implemented by the Public Ministry continues to escalate, especially against independent justice officials, journalists, litigants and human rights defenders who have worked in the fight against corruption and impunity and in the defense of human rights in the country.

In light of this, we strongly urge the government of Guatemala to:

- immediately release Claudia González Orellana from pre-trial detention
- respect due process and allow the public access to her court proceedings
- guarantee the rights and integrity of Claudia González Orellana, the lawyers she is currently representing, and the electoral process in Guatemala

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators


Christine Stonebraker Martinez

copies: Licda. María Consuelo Porras Argueta, Attorney General / Fiscal General de la República ~ via email
Lic. José Alejandro Córdoba, Procurador de Derechos Humanos/Human Rights Ombudsman ~ via email
Dr. Ramiro Alejandro Contreras Escobar, Executive Director of COPADEH: Comisión Presidencial por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos
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
US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

22 SEP 2023_RightsAction_Guatemala

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