



Peace Brigades International

UPDATE

Guatemala

Mexico

Honduras

8/15—10/21, 2022

Guatemalan Cardinal Heads Nonviolent Resistance Group to Confront Rights Abuses

On October 2, Guatemalan Cardinal Alvaro Ramazzini, together with human rights organizations, announced the creation of a coalition called the [National Resistance Convergence](#) (CNR). The coalition seeks to confront corruption, the co-optation of the Judiciary, and the persecution of those who fight against corruption. “The country has a predatory and insatiable economic elite, a corrupt and fundamentalist political class; in addition, we lack reliable, proactive and honest political or social leadership,” the groups said in a press conference. Cardinal Ramazzini [said](#) there are currently no counterweights to the power concentrated in the hands of a group of people who seek their own self-interest. “Now organized crime rules, supported by the violence of the narco-traffickers and impunity; the principle of legality is not complied with, and, as happens in a dictatorial system, society is not governed by law and is drifting.” The CNR hopes to spark a dialogue among various sectors of civil society.

As emblematic cases of persecution, criminalization, prosecution, and imprisonment of former prosecutors, judges, human rights defenders and journalists by the government, the group mentioned the imprisonment of former prosecutor Virginia Laparra and journalist José Rubén Zamora; the exile of prosecutors Thelma Aldana, Juan Francisco Sandoval, and judge Erika Aifán; the harassment of independent judges, such as Miguel Ángel Gálvez, as well as the systematic attacks on freedom of thought, expression, information and press. “Faced with such a dramatic and challenging panorama, we call for unity and organization, participation and nonviolent resistance so that together we can dream and work for a different Guatemala, fighting against corruption, impunity and the electoral fraud of 2023, which they already have in preparation,” the communiqué concludes.

As the *Los Angeles Times* [points out](#), “The international community has raised its voice in alarm for what it considers a weakening of the rule of law and the guarantees of the population, specifically for the criminalization denounced by justice officials, several of whom have gone into exile, for their rulings against corruption and in cases of crimes of the civil war (1960-1996).”

Record-Setting Number of Attacks Recorded During Giammattei’s Administration

In the first two-and-a-half years of the Alejandro Giammattei administration, more attacks on human rights defenders have occurred than during the four-year terms of any other administration in post-conflict Guatemala. As the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala (UDEFEFUGUA) illustrated in an August 24 [press conference](#), from 2019 to the end of 2021, attacks on human rights defenders more than doubled.

UDEFEFUGUA documented 589 attacks in the first six months of 2022. Of the 589 attacks recorded from January through June 2022, justice operators (a term that covers those working to prosecute crimes, as well as judges) were hardest hit: 272 attacks were carried out against this sector. The second-highest number of attacks—114—were levied against those seeking justice. Journalists suffered 51 attacks. Attacks against defenders of land, territory, and the environment

numbered 47. Defamation, harassment (which includes persecution and surveillance), and malicious lawsuits accounted for the majority of attacks.

Forty-five percent of the attacks in the first six months of this year were against women human rights defenders. This figure represents a sharp increase. Attacks against women defenders in the first half of this year, at 263, had reached more than 75 percent of last year's twelve-month total.

Finance Director of *El Periodico* Arrested On August 19, Guatemala's Public Ministry ordered the [arrest](#) of the finance director of the investigative newspaper *El Periodico*. As in the case of the newspaper's founder and director [José Rubén Zamora](#), who was arrested on July 29, Finance Director Flora Silva's home was raided prior to her arrest. According to a statement released by *El Periodico*, Silva had been cooperating with Public Ministry authorities since the investigation began into alleged blackmail and money laundering by Zamora. Silva had a hypertension crisis during the raid and was hospitalized after her arrest. The [statement](#) by *El Periodico* points out that Silva's arrest followed the same pattern as in Zamora's. Authorities used vehicles with [covered license plates](#) and unnecessary, extensive raids, in an apparent effort to harass and intimidate the accused.

IACHR Issues Statement of Concern about Freedom of Expression in Guatemala

In a September 2 [communiqué](#), the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) expressed concern about reports related to freedom of the press in Guatemala and called on the Guatemalan government to fully and effectively guarantee freedom of expression and freedom of the press. "In recent months," according to the communiqué, "the Office of the Special Rapporteur has received several reports that call for the attention of the Office with respect to freedom of expression in Guatemala, mainly related to attacks, intimidation and judicial harassment with alleged silencing purposes. In particular, the judicial prosecution of journalists coincides with the validity of IACHR reports on the weakening of judicial independence in Guatemala." The communiqué cited José Rubén Zamora's and Flora Silva's arrests and stated that freedom of the press includes not only editorial activities but also those related to the sustainability of the media.

The IACHR's statement noted that journalist José Rubén Zamora has been the beneficiary of precautionary measures from the IACHR since 2003, when the Commission understood that there was an imminent risk to his life and personal integrity due to a series of physical attacks and threats received in the exercise of his profession, and the context of violence against the press in Guatemala. The IACHR and its Special Rapporteur's Office revealed that they had recently asked the Guatemalan government to allow them to conduct a working visit to verify Zamora's situation.

Other cases of concern mentioned by the IACHR include the September 2021 lawsuit filed by a former Minister of Communications against journalist Juan Luis Font, director of the news program *Con Criterio*, for allegedly committing the crimes of illicit association and collusion. The reporter confirmed to the IACHR that he had left the country and denounced harassment and reprisals related to his work. In June 2022, the MP opened an investigation into journalists with Agencia Ocote after they interviewed a prosecutor in prison and produced a podcast about her case. Likewise, in 2021, criminal cases were filed against journalists Sonny Figueroa and Marvin del Cid by government officials and former government officials, allegedly after they published journalistic investigations involving those government officials. The Special Rapporteur's Office said it was especially concerned about the cases of Anastasia Mejía and Michelle Mendoza, among

other women journalists investigating issues related to corruption and impunity in Guatemala who have also reported on the deterioration of guarantees to their freedom of expression. The documented information indicates that threats through social networks, as well as the judicial processes faced by women journalists, are elements of gender-based violence that the Guatemalan government must consider.

The Special Rapporteur's Office has documented the murder of journalist Orlando Villanueva in Puerto Barrios, department of Izabal, among other acts of violence, which include alleged aggressions and destruction of reporters' work equipment. The Office has given particular follow-up to the cases of journalists Juan Bautista Xol, Baudilio Choc, and Carlos Choc, who publicly denounced judicial proceedings against them and police operations at their residences after they covered a series of demonstrations by the Mayan Q'eqchi' population in El Estor, Izabal, and the use of public force to disperse them in October 2021. The information gathered by the Office of the Special Rapporteur, according to the communique, indicates that these incidents are occurring in a context of intense legal action against people who play a relevant role in public life and contribute to the democratic debate in Guatemala.

DOD Gives 95 Vehicles, Valued at \$4.4 Million, to the Guatemalan Army The United States Department of Defense has donated 95 vehicles to the Guatemalan army, aimed at supporting border security and stability in the region, according to an October 13 [press release](#) by the US embassy in Guatemala. Defense Minister Henry Reyes Chigua received the vehicles at the [Mariscal Zavala Military Base 95](#), where, incidentally, journalist José Rubén Zamora is being detained, along with prosecutor [Virginia Laparra](#) and [Flora Silva Flores](#). According to the US embassy, “This donation concludes the US Fiscal Year 2019 proposal to donate equipment to support border security efforts in Guatemala to provide stability in and protect the region. The donation of Toyota Hilux vehicles, Hino 5- and 12-ton trucks, Toyota Land Cruisers, and Suzuki off-road motorcycles, valued at \$4.4 million, was made through Title 10, Section 333 of the Office of Security Cooperation as part of the U.S. Department of Defense's "Building Allied Capabilities" program. The ‘Building Allied Capabilities’ program will strengthen the capabilities of the Reconnaissance Companies of the Second, Third, and Fifth Infantry Brigades to protect Guatemala against drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. The vehicles will enable Guatemalan forces to maneuver and move quickly and efficiently to maintain border security. The brigades benefiting are concentrated on the border with Honduras in Zacapa, on the border with El Salvador in Jutiapa, and on the border with Mexico in Huehuetenango.” Ambassador William Popp stated that he was “proud to recall the ways in which the United States and Guatemala have worked together to improve the safety and wellbeing of Guatemalans.”

Concerns about Transparency of Guatemala's 2023 Elections Mount Thirteen organizations in Guatemala [have raised concerns](#) that the election equipment purchased by the Guatemalan government for the 2023 presidential election was acquired irregularly, without an open, transparent bidding process. The organizations submitted a communique outlining their [concerns](#) to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and Guatemalan media outlets. The notice for bids was posted only on the TSE's website, for example, and only for a short time. Companies had only eight days to submit bids. The organizations called on the TSE to clarify and repeat the process. The TSE [responded](#) that it followed the legal requirements. The only organization that submitted a bid is a company linked to former Vice Minister in the Giammattei administration, Elizandro López Flores. López Flores is the legal representative for the sole company to bid, Smartmatic

Holdings, based in the British Virgin Islands and registered in Guatemala in June 2022.

Without announcing it, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal TSE and the Ministry of National Defense in June [signed](#) an agreement of “inter-institutional cooperation,” for the “transfer of information, data and documents.” The agreement detailed that the collaboration between both entities will allow “establishing, defining and developing computer links, mechanisms and procedures” to guarantee the existence of a “reliable electoral roll.”

Guatemala fell eight points in the corruption index [rank](#) between 2012 and 2021, according to Trading Economics. On a scale of 0-100, with 0 being most corrupt, Guatemala is ranked at 25. Transparency International [ranks](#) Guatemala 150 out of 180 countries, in the bottom sixth in terms of corruption.

Guatemalan Congress Considers Bill Permitting Broader Use of Force in Demonstrations

A [bill](#) pertaining to the use of force by the security forces and the army during demonstrations is advancing in the Guatemalan Congress. Known as the Law for the Strengthening of Public Security Forces and the army of Guatemala (bill 6072, amended to 6076), the bill was introduced by the [Union of National Change](#) (UCN).¹ It varies from the [protocol](#) adopted by the National Civil Police in September 2020, allowing broader discretion in the use of force against protesters by the police, the army, and presidential security agents. The Guatemalan National Civil Police have been [criticized internationally](#) in the past two years for excessive use of force.

On August 10, the Congress sought to hear the second reading of the bill but ended up discussing whether the bill should be sent to the Constitutional Court for analysis. The bill was again on the agenda in the congressional session of August 17 to consider whether it should be sent to the Constitutional Court. Before the issue could be debated, however, parties supporting the bill broke the quorum by leaving the room. The 48 Cantons of Totonicapan had been maintaining a presence in Congress, demanding that the bill be shelved.

News reports [have described](#) the bill as an effort “to avoid prison for police officers who use their weapons.” The bill stipulates that those accused of using inappropriate force would not await trial in detention but would be granted alternative measures, such as house arrest. It also suggests that law enforcement officials act in legitimate defense when there is a possible threat to life posed by a demonstrator, rather than strictly an actual, imminent threat. [According to](#) Plaza Publica, agents who are subject to criminal proceedings under the law would remain on active duty and continue to receive full pay and benefits.

Although the bill states that the law would not be used to restrict or hamper peaceful, unarmed demonstrations, it allows for broad discretion in the application of force. Clauses of the bill vary significantly from use-of-force norms. Most protocols, including the one currently in use by the National Civil Police, allow security forces to use lethal force if there is imminent risk to the life or physical safety of the police officer or a third party. This bill omits the third party, authorizing the use of lethal force only to protect members of the security forces and the army. It also introduces conditionality. It states that the security forces and army are acting in legitimate defense if they are acting in defense of themselves or their members, as long as there is an aggression that puts at risk—or *could* put at risk—the life or physical safety of its own members. This phraseology could open the door to broad impunity for excessive use of force.

¹ The US embassy, in a cable released by Wikileaks in 2011, summarized the UCN thusly: “narco.” The founder and perennial presidential candidate of the UCN, Mario Estrada, was arrested in Miami in 2019 on charges of drug trafficking and is [serving](#) a 15-year sentence in the United States. UCN Representative Sofia Hernández was included in the 2022 [Engel List](#), in part for using her drug-trafficking connections to intimidate opponents.

The bill reflects President Alejandro Giammattei's position as he [stated it](#) upon taking office: "A police officer today is afraid to use his weapon because he hasn't had a state that supports him. This is a clear message to the security forces: Defend us and the state will defend you."

On August 17, *El Periodico* [reported](#) that the Ministry of the Interior had recently purchased a total of 22,500 flashbang grenades used for stunning and 22,500 tear gas cartridges for use by the National Civil Police. The acquisition was made for the amount of Q24,952,500 (approximately \$3,225,934) from [Tactical Group, S.A.](#) Another contract, for over \$200,000, was signed in August between the Ministry of Defense and Tactical Group, S.A. Destined for use by the Military Police, the Ministry of Defense obtained tear gas dispensers, tear gas grenades for hand launching, tactical cartridge launchers, electric paralyzers, and tear gas projectiles.

Guatemalan Congress Passes Bill to Provide Reparations to Military Veterans

In mid-October, the Guatemalan congress passed Decree 6073, which provides recompense to military veterans who served during the internal armed conflict. The Convergence for Human Rights, a coalition of human rights organizations in Guatemala, said the passage of the bill was an insult to the memory of victims of state terrorism. In a [communique](#), the Convergence pointed out that the soldiers had received their pay during their service and had received their benefits upon leaving the military. Victims of hurricanes Iota and Eta had not been attended to, and victims of the recent Hurricane Julia suffered from a lack of preparation on the government's part. The Convergence pointed out that 240,000 people were executed during the internal armed conflict and another 50,000 were disappeared. A court, the Convergence noted, had found that genocide was committed.²

Protests by Guatemalan military veterans on October 4, which appeared to include tepid efforts at [violence](#), were undertaken to pressure for the passage of [three bills](#) in Congress that would benefit veterans by providing them additional compensation for their service and opportunities to earn pay doing environmental work, such as reforestation. President Giammattei, when he was running for office, promised to reward military veterans if they voted for him. The Convergence for Human Rights stated that the passage of Decree 6073 seeks to legitimize the dictatorial process and authoritarian regression underway in Guatemala.

At United Nations, PBI Expresses Alarm about Repressive Policies in Guatemala

In a joint statement on Guatemala made on September 26, during the [general debate of Item 4](#) of the UN Human Rights Council, Peace Brigades International [called](#) attention to increasingly repressive policies and violations of human rights in Guatemala. The statement was co-sponsored by Franciscans International and the World Organisation Against Torture. "The deterioration of the rule of law, the co-optation of the justice system, the weakening of national human rights institutions, and the closing of civic spaces continue to advance," said PBI's representative in Geneva, Kim-Mai Vu. "We are concerned about the frequency and intensity of attacks against

² Although the verdict was overturned on a technicality, the Guatemalan army [was found](#) by a court of law to have committed [genocide](#) during the internal armed conflict. The Catholic Church's truth commission also [found](#) that the Guatemalan government had carried out genocide, as did the [UN-led truth commission](#), which concluded that "acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, numerous groups of Mayans were not isolated acts or excesses committed by soldiers who were out of control, nor were they the result of possible improvisation by mid-level army command. With great consternation, the CEH concludes that many massacres and other human rights violations committed against these groups obeyed a higher, strategically planned policy, manifested in actions which had a logical and coherent sequence."

individuals, organizations, and indigenous communities that defend the rights to land, territory and the environment. “. . . [E]ntire communities are being subjected to violent and forced evictions by nonstate actors, mainly in Alta and Baja Verapaz, without the state reacting or protecting their rights.” According to PBI and the co-sponsors of the statement, the Guatemalan government has facilitated these illegal and violent procedures by dismantling the Human Rights Prosecutor's Office and creating a Prosecutor's Office of Usurpation,³ which has been used against defenders. The groups called on the Human Rights Council to demand that the Guatemalan government investigate and prosecute those responsible for attacks against human rights defenders; immediately stop the violent judicial and extrajudicial evictions; install effective mechanisms with sufficient resources to seek dialogue-based solutions to agrarian conflicts; and renew the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Guatemala.

More information on Guatemala and PBI's work in Guatemala can be found [here](#).

MEXICO

Email Hack Reveals Army Spies on Journalists and Activists and Sells Weapons to Cartels

A [hack](#) of the email of Mexico's Ministry of Defense (SEDENA) by the hacker collective Guacamaya has revealed that, under the current administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the Mexican army has been spying on journalists and activists using Israeli-made Pegasus software. Soldier have also [sold weapons](#) to drug cartels. Some of this equipment included tactical equipment, such as bulletproof vests, surveillance systems, and infrared vision binoculars, but the equipment sold to the cartels by the army also included grenades. As journalist Luis Chaparro [explained](#) to Democracy Now, “They were selling fragmentation grenades for 26,000 pesos each, around \$1,300 each grenade, and they were being delivered, according to these leaked documents, even within the same Military Base No. 1, which is one of the largest in Mexico City.” The Cerezo Committee, a human rights organization that has been accompanied for more than twenty years by PBI, was included in the Ministry of Defense's records on a [page](#) titled “Subversion,” under the heading “Disruptive Groups in Mexico City.”

UN High Commissioner's Office Condemns Mexican Army's Spying on Journalists

The Office in Mexico of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) expressed on October 11 its “deep concern” over the Mexican army's spying on journalists and human rights defenders. “These practices are serious acts of intrusion, violating human rights and undermining the confidence of the population in state institutions,” said Guillermo Fernandez-Maldonado, UNHCHR representative in Mexico in a [statement](#). Defenders of human rights and journalists are fundamental actors for democracy and for the strengthening of the rule of law.”

Murders of Land and Territory Defenders Nearly Doubled in 2021 As [Global Witness](#) reports, Mexico had the highest number of murders of environmental defenders in 2021, accounting for more than a quarter of the world's total. In Mexico, 54 environmental defenders were murdered last year, up from 30 the previous year—an 80 percent increase. Over 40 percent of the defenders

³The [Fiscalia Contra Delitos de Usurpacion](#), by its Spanish name, was created in October 2021.

murdered in Mexico were Indigenous people. More than a third of the total were abducted and disappeared, according to Global Witness, [including](#) at least eight members of the Yaqui community. Four mass killings were reported.

Across the world in 2021, 200 land and environmental defenders were murdered. These lethal attacks, according to Global Witness, “continue to take place in the context of a wider range of threats against defenders who are being targeted by government, business, and other non-state actors with violence, intimidation, smear campaigns and criminalization.” Two-thirds of the women defenders killed throughout the world were Indigenous.

Mexico has ratified the [Escazú Agreement](#), the first legally binding treaty aimed at protecting environmental defenders—but has yet to effectively implement it. The agreement requires states to prevent and investigate attacks against environmental defenders.

Warrants Issued for Soldiers in Ayotzinapa Case Cancelled; Special Prosecutor Resigns

On August 19, the Prosecutor General’s Office issued 83 arrest warrants for suspects in the Ayotzinapa case, including 20 for members of the military. One of the warrants was for an army general, José Rodríguez, commander of the 27th Infantry Battalion, based in Iguala, Guerrero, at the time of the attack. The arrests warrants were not carried out, however, and in September, the Prosecutor General’s Office cancelled 21 of the warrants, the majority of them for soldiers with the 27th and 41st Battalions in Iguala. Apparently in response to this decision, the special prosecutor in the case, Omar Gómez Trejo, [resigned](#), after leading the special unit investigating the case for more than three years. Mexico’s former Attorney General, Jesús Murillo Karam, [was arrested](#), however, in late August and awaits trial in prison, charged with kidnapping, torture, and obstruction of justice.

September 26 marked eight years since the disappearance of the 43 students, who were traveling to Mexico City from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Training College. Further evidence has surfaced of military and civilian authorities’ collusion with organized criminal actors at the time of the enforced disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students. The Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) in [a new report](#) points to documents that show that all battalions in the 35th Military Zone were ordered to closely follow the activities of the students, since the students’ activities might “alter the public order.” The students were headed to Mexico City to commemorate the 1968 [massacre](#) of protesters who had been demonstrating against police brutality.

The GIEI’s [previous report](#), released in March 2022, revealed that military authorities and the National Intelligence Center (CISEN) were informed in real time of the attack on the students and of their abduction/disappearance. The army had intelligence personnel enrolled in the university, who provided real-time information on all activities. Since September 14, 2014, the army knew of all the activities that had been planned to stock up on vehicles and resources for the October 2 march. A protected witness testified that state police and the military were involved in detaining the students and that the students were executed and their remains dispersed. Based on his information, the remains of two of the missing students were found. Forty remain disappeared.

Movement for Disappeared Receives Letelier-Moffitt Award in Washington, DC

On October 13, the Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Mexico (Movement for our Disappeared in Mexico) won the Letelier-Moffitt Award from the Institute for Policy Studies. Founded in 2015, the Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Mexico is a movement of families across Mexico searching for truth and justice for their [disappeared loved ones](#). Made up of over 80 groups from 24 Mexican states, the Movimiento has led extraordinary efforts to excavate mass graves across the country and pass the first piece of [legislation](#) in Mexico on the issue while

facing drug cartels, corrupt officials, and an indifferent bureaucracy. More than 100,000 people have been disappeared in Mexico in recent decades. ([See more](#) on this issue [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)

Government Apologizes to Human Rights Defender Digna Ochoa's Family On October 19, the Mexican government [publicly apologized](#) to the family of Digna Ochoa y Placido. Digna Ochoa was murdered in 2001. The Mexican government developed a theory that she had killed herself and staged the scene to look like a murder. She had been shot twice in her law office, and a note was left threatening other lawyers. Digna Ochoa had received multiple death threats before her killing and had fled into exile in Washington, DC for several months before returning to Mexico to continue her work as an attorney. She worked to defend criminalized environmental defenders and to hold the army accountable for human rights violations and was internationally known, having [received](#) the Roque Dalton Award from Amnesty International. In January 2022, the Inter-American Court [ruled](#) that the government had carried out a seriously flawed investigation into her case and damaged the honor of Digna Ochoa.⁴ The Court ordered that the government re-investigate the case and prosecute and punish those responsible for her death.

The Mexican government during the apology noted that Digna had dedicated her life to justice and that the incidents related to her murder had revictimized her family, which like Digna was tenacious in their insistence on justice. The apology was part of the reparations ordered by the Court. Also ordered by the Court was the naming of a street for Digna Ochoa in Mexico City and in her hometown of Misantla, Veracruz. During the apology, the announcement of the new streets was made. The road in Mexico City is next to the Attorney General's office. The government promised to conduct an exhaustive investigation so that her family would at last be accorded their right to truth and justice. The Mexico city prosecutor's office [has reopened](#) the case and has formed a special investigative commission to clarify the circumstances of her death. The government must also develop a public policy for the protection of human rights defenders, and strengthen protections for human rights defenders.

Mexico Continues Efforts to Stop Illegal US Weapons from Crossing Border The Mexican government plans to bring another lawsuit against US companies it claims are responsible for the flow of illegal weapons into Mexico, as NBC news [reports](#). Foreign Affairs Secretary Marcelo Ebrard suggested the new lawsuit could target gun shops or dealers in US border states like Arizona who sell guns to "straw" purchasers who pass them on to smugglers, who then take the weapons into Mexico. Ebrard said about 60 percent of the weapons seized in Mexico in recent years were believed to have been sold in ten US counties, mostly along the border. "Mexico is going to file the second lawsuit in Arizona, and we are going to show that many of these outlets where they sell these products in these counties I mentioned, are dealing with straw purchasers, and criminal charges have to be brought," Ebrard said in an appearance before the Mexican Senate. The announcement came several days after a US federal judge dismissed Mexico's first lawsuit against US gun manufacturers. Ebrard said Mexico would appeal that decision.

⁴ The Court concluded that the death of Digna Ochoa took place in a generalized context of impunity for the murders of human rights defenders at the time of the events in this case in Mexico and that it was preceded by years of threats made against her. This, in addition to the absolutely deficient investigation of her death by the Mexican authorities, did not shed light on the particular circumstances surrounding her death and, therefore, in itself, constituted a violation of the obligation to guarantee the right to life of Mrs. Digna Ochoa. In addition, her relatives' right to the truth was violated."

Learn more about PBI's work in Mexico [here](#).

HONDURAS

Journalist and His Father Murdered Journalist Edwin Andino Canaca and his father Edwin Andino Amador were shot to death on October 10. According to [reports](#), they were pulled out of their house in the Villa Franca neighborhood of Tegucigalpa by unidentified men dressed in uniforms of the Military Police of Public Order. Edwin Canaca and his father were later found shot to death. Edwin Canaca had been working for a year in production for LTV and had no known enemies. He is reportedly the [fifth](#) journalist killed this year in Honduras. In terms of the number of murders of journalists per capita, Honduras is the most dangerous country in the region for journalists.

Trans Activist Murdered [Melissa Nuñez](#), a trans rights activist, was murdered in Morocelí, El Paraíso on October 18. She was the sixth trans person murdered in 2022, and her death is the latest of at least 33 murders this year of members of the LGBTQI community, according to figures cited by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Honduras. According to [press reports](#), she was shot to death outside her home by hooded gunmen who fired repeatedly at her from a vehicle.

Eight Land and Territory Defenders Killed in Honduras in 2021 According to [Global Witness](#), eight defenders of the environment/land and territory were murdered in Honduras in 2021. Honduras has not signed or ratified the Escazu Agreement, in spite of being one of the countries that participated in negotiating the agreement in 2018. [According to](#) Via Campesina and the National Center of Rural Workers (CNTC)*, between 2010 and 2021 at least 165 people were killed for defending land and territory in Honduras.

In 2022, through August, PBI Honduras recorded 60 security incidents related to the defense of land and territory. PBI's record includes several murders, such as that of Justo Benítez, of the Santabarbarens Environmental Movement (MAS); Alonso Salgado, Garifuna leader and former member of the Río Tinto community board in Tela; and Donaldo Rosales of the Environmental Committee of the Northeastern Municipalities of Comayagua (CAMNECO). The same Via Campesina and CNTC report indicates that 96 percent of crimes against defenders of land and territory go unpunished. PBI is also concerned about some decrees approved in the midst of the pandemic, such as PCM 030-2020, which declares the agro-industrial and agro-export sector a national priority while at the same time displacing small and medium-sized producers, worsening the food crisis. This decree has not yet been repealed by the new government.

OACNUDH Urges Strengthening of Protection Mechanism The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Honduras [repeated](#) a call for the strengthening of the country's national protective mechanism for human rights defenders. From January 1 to August 31, 2022, OACNUDH documented at least 9 murders of human rights defenders and 2 journalists. The office documented a total of 96 cases of attacks, affecting 120 human rights defenders and 31 journalists, endangering the civic space of citizens.

PBI Calls for Indigenous Rights and Justice in Case of Berta Cáceres and Tomás García

On September 28, Kim-Mai Vu, of Peace Brigades International, presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland during the Interactive Dialogue with the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. “In Honduras, international attention is required towards the promotion of laws to protect and recognize the rights of indigenous peoples in their territories, as well as to achieve truth and full justice in the murder of Berta Cáceres,” said Vu. “Crimes such as the murder in 2013 of the Lenca indigenous leader and defender of the Gualcarque River, Tomás García, continue to go unpunished. The pressure on common goods in indigenous territory continues and reports of violence, criminalization and forced displacement multiply in territories such as Azacualpa, Las Vegas de Tepemechín, Locomapa, Jiniguare and Reitoca.”

During the interactive dialogue with the Working Group on Forced or Involuntary Disappearances, Kim-Mai Vu raised [concern](#) about Garifuna leaders disappeared two years ago: “Despite the request of the Inter-American Court, the forced disappearance of four Garifuna leaders from Triunfo de la Cruz in 2020 has not yet been clarified. We are concerned about the possible relationship between the disappearance and the failure to comply with the ruling of the Inter-American Court on land titles of the ancestral territories of the community.”

Gualcarque Trial Delayed As a result of complaints filed by Berta Cáceres and the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), the Mission to Support the Anti-Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, MACCIH, together with the anti-corruption prosecutorial unit (formerly UFECIC, now UFERCO), presented an indictment on March 4, 2019 against 16 state functionaries in a case called known as Fraud on the Gualcarque. The investigation confirmed what COPINH had denounced: the existence of a network of corruption within the processes of granting licenses and negotiating power-generation contracts. Although a December 2020 Supreme Court ruling favored 10 of the 16 people initially accused, the trial began July 25, 2022. The trial remains on hold now, due to the Supreme Court’s failure to a rule on an appeal filed by the prosecution to permit the additional evidence. As COPINH [notes](#), the Court’s delay in ruling on the appeal violates the legal principles of the immediacy of judicial processes and the rights of access to justice and due process for the victims in this case, the indigenous community of Río Blanco and COPINH.

For more information on PBI’s work in Honduras, see the Honduras Project’s [website](#).

[Peace Brigades International](#) sends teams of international observers to areas of conflict and repression to provide protective accompaniment to human rights defenders whose lives and work are under threat. Founded in 1981, with its first project in Guatemala, PBI has worked in fourteen countries and on four continents and has consultative status before the UN. PBI’s international office in Brussels and advocacy staff in Geneva and around the world support efforts in the field to open space for peace and the defense of human rights.