

Statement of Solidarity with the Guatemalan Peoples

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is working with the Latin American Working Group and the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission to gather signatures for a statement of solidarity with Guatemalan democracy protesters.

We the undersigned write to express our solidarity with the Guatemalan people, including many Indigenous peoples, engaged today in a difficult struggle for democracy, human rights, and accountability. We join them in condemning the violent and dishonest tactics of the Guatemalan government and the “Pact of the Corrupt” it represents, who seek to overturn the August 20, 2023 elections and prevent President-Elect Bernardo Arévalo from taking office on January 14, 2024. We call on the government to respect the election results and the rights of Guatemalans to peaceful protest. We urge international leaders to hold Guatemalan officials to account.

As recognized by the international community, Arévalo’s Movimiento Semilla party won by a landslide, with 58% of the vote. Sick and tired of the lack of social services and jobs, and a corrupt, absentee government, Guatemalans voted for a change.

Tactics used by the Guatemalan government include intimidation, threats, and legal actions against election workers and members of the Semilla party. The Attorney General’s office has ordered the special anti-corruption unit and the National Civilian Police to raid the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) offices four times, illegally searching and removing electoral material, jeopardizing the integrity of the electoral process. Secretary General Almagro of the Organization of American States asserted that the permanent and baseless harassment by the Attorney General constitutes a political persecution reminiscent of that carried out by authoritarian regimes.

Attorney General Porras’ seizure of electoral ballots during the most recent raid on September 29 sparked peaceful protests and blockades throughout the country. The demonstrations began on October 2, 2023 by Indigenous authorities of the 48 Cantons of Totonicapán, K’iche’, Ixil, and ancestral communities outraged at the theft of the ballots and the threat to democracy. Human rights activists, women’s groups, students, businesses, workers, and religious leaders are peacefully participating in the demonstrations. The protestors are demanding the resignation of Attorney General Porras, Special Prosecutor Currichiche, and Judge Fredy Orellana as the most public faces of the corruption in Guatemala and the threat to democracy.

President Giammattei, Attorney General Porras and others have falsely accused the demonstrations of being violent and criminal, instigated by President-Elect Arévalo, and supported by international NGOs. They seek to end the protests, divide the opposition, and blame the Semilla Party for the unrest with the ultimate goal of overturning the election results. We stand with the protesters.

The Guatemalan people have been an inspiration to the world in the years since the end of armed conflict in their country. Working with the United Nations, they have offered a model of how to transition to democracy and hold human rights violators and corrupt officials accountable. Recent governments and their corrupt partners in the military, corporate sector, and organized crime have used lawfare, threats, and attacks to undermine this process, dismantle democratic institutions, and chase judges, prosecutors, journalists, and human rights defenders into exile. As demoralizing as these setbacks have been, the Guatemalan people have not given up. The recent elections put the Pact of the Corrupt on notice. As the government attempts to overturn those elections, the response of thousands of protesters taking peacefully to the streets has reminded the world of the extraordinary spirit of the Guatemalan people.

We stand in solidarity with the brave people of Guatemala. We urge the government of the United States to apply Global Magnitsky sanctions against Attorney General Porras, Special Prosecutor Currichiche, and others. We echo the Guatemalan people’s call for their government to respect the constitutional right to peaceful protest, respect the results of the election, and proceed with the peaceful transition of power to President-Elect Arévalo. The world is watching how you choose to proceed.

We wish strength and courage to the Indigenous peoples, land defenders, human rights advocates, activists and all Guatemalans seeking to save democracy and the rule of law. Thank you for your sacrifice, your vision, and the example you set for the world with your brave struggle. We will not abandon you. §

Faith in Action: Sign the statement of solidarity, and invite friends to do the same at <https://mogc.info/Guate-Solidarity>