

## **U.S. Civil Society Organizations Express Dismay at USG Donation of \$4.4 million in Vehicles to Guatemalan Military**

The undersigned organizations express our profound dismay at the extraordinarily counterproductive decision by the Defense Department to reward the Guatemalan military in October 2022 with a \$4.4 million donation of vehicles.

The political message this sends is even more deeply counterproductive because the [public ceremony](#) attended by the U.S. ambassador handing over the vehicles took place at the Mariscal Zavala Military Base. At the base's detention center, acclaimed journalist José Rubén Zamora is being unjustly [imprisoned](#) and honest prosecutors such as Virginia Laparra were previously also unjustly [held](#).

This indefensible action comes as corrupt networks—including military elites—consolidate their control over Guatemala's government and judicial system. It also comes as the State Department has wisely declined to certify that Guatemala meets the human rights and anti-corruption conditions attached to the State, Foreign Operations law for FY22, which should result in freezing 50 percent of aid to the central government of Guatemala (excluding some categories of aid such as humanitarian assistance). The donation thus directly undercuts efforts by the State Department, in accordance with the State, Foreign Operations law, to ensure there are some consequences in reaction to the Guatemalan government's actions to undermine the rule of law.

As U.S. government officials well know, the rule of law in Guatemala is on a dramatic downward spiral. Corrupt, predatory political, military, and economic elites have captured the state, from the executive branch to the Attorney General's office. Guatemala's Attorney General is [targeting](#) the nation's remaining honest judges and prosecutors with false legal cases. Added to the deadly threats and attacks against them, these actions by the Attorney General are forcing honest judges and prosecutors to flee the country. Twenty-four judges and prosecutors, including the nation's lead anti-corruption prosecutor and two former Attorneys General, were forced into exile. The legislature and executive branch have also advanced laws that make it more difficult to investigate and punish corrupt officials while closing civic space, making it harder for activists and journalists to expose and denounce corruption. Human rights defenders, including indigenous activists, as well as journalists, face false legal charges, social media defamation campaigns, and an [escalation](#) of threats, attacks, and assassinations.

In this context, the failure of the USG to maintain a consistent, principled stance against the corrupt takeover of the Guatemalan state is confounding, counterproductive—and wrong.

Latin America Working Group

Guatemala Human Rights Commission USA

Hope Border Institute

Network in Solidarity with the Guatemalan People (NISGUA)

Committee in Solidarity with the Salvadoran People (CISPES)

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Additional background: Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), [The U.S. Military Announced a Military Aid Donation to Guatemala. Here's Why It Is a Mistake](#). See also these reports: LAWG, WOLA, GHRC, [Guatemala's Downward Spiral](#); [Under Assault in Guatemala: Journalists & Indigenous & Human Rights Activists](#), and [When the Dominoes Fall: Cooptation of the Justice System in Guatemala](#).