

Under Assault in Guatemala: Journalists & Indigenous & Human Rights Activists

In Guatemala, human rights defenders, independent judges and prosecutors, journalists, and Indigenous leaders are under assault as part of a broader attack on democracy and path towards a kleptocracy. The criminalization and closing of civic space is one of the strategies being used by corrupt networks, the Attorney General's Office, private actors, members of the military, and political elites to quell disruptions to their power, avoid historic responsibility for crimes committed during the internal armed conflict, and silence voices exposing corruption. It has resulted in severe democratic backsliding, creating a dangerous terrain in which people defending human rights and the rule of law receive no State protection and are instead persecuted and criminalized by their own government in complicity with private actors, often to the point of having to flee the country for their lives. The current situation in Guatemala creates serious challenges for U.S. policy and assistance and means that civil society organizations, human rights defenders, Indigenous communities, and journalists are more in need of international protection than ever.

In Guatemala, human rights defenders, independent judges and prosecutors, journalists, and Indigenous leaders are under assault as part of a broader attack on democracy and path towards a kleptocracy. The closure of civic space in Guatemala under President Alejandro Giammattei is part of a downward spiral that began under former President Jimmy Morales with the expulsion of the international anti-corruption mechanism known as CICIG (International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala). Efforts to uphold the rule of law, expose corruption, and defend rights have threatened the control that a small minority of economic and political elites have held over resources, land, and politics in Guatemala at the expense of the majority Indigenous and mestizo populations. Once CICIG was closed, those same corrupt elites accelerated their efforts to coopt state institutions and target and restrict the actions of civil society organizations, human rights defenders, Indigenous community leaders, independent journalists, and honest judges and prosecutors to defend democratic rule and human rights.

The consequences for human rights defenders have been staggering. As the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala (UDEFEUGA) [illustrated](#) in an August 2022 [press conference](#), in the first two-and-a-half years of President Giammattei's administration, more attacks on human rights defenders have occurred than during the four-year terms of any other administration in post-conflict Guatemala. From 2019 to the end of 2021, according to UDEFEUGA, attacks on human rights defenders more than doubled.

The criminalization of those defending human rights and exposing corruption is one of the strategies being used by these corrupt networks, and is used by the Attorney General's Office, private actors such as the Foundation against Terrorism (FcT), members of the military, and political elites to quell disruptions to their power. This has resulted in severe democratic backsliding and has created a dangerous terrain in which human rights defenders, journalists, Indigenous community leaders, and justice operators receive no State protection and are instead persecuted and criminalized by their own government in



complicity with private actors, often to the point of having to flee the country for their lives. This memo outlines the risks facing human rights defenders, journalists, and Indigenous communities, while a separate memo outlines the risks facing justice operators.

The current situation in Guatemala makes achieving U.S. policy goals in the country extremely challenging. The context of unbridled corruption, and stigmatization and persecution of anti-corruption activists and independent voices means that civil society organizations, human rights defenders, Indigenous communities, and journalists are more in need of international protection than ever. It also means they are unable to make progress on 1) combating corruption, strengthening democratic governance, and advancing the rule of law, and 2) promoting respect for human rights, labor rights, and a free press—two pillars of the White House Strategy for addressing the root causes of migration in Central America. It poses difficulties for U.S. assistance and the extent to which the U.S. can partner with and provide aid to the judiciary, Attorney General's Office, and other institutions. When citizens cannot trust in the institutions meant to protect the rule of law and their rights, their loss of trust in government and sense of hopelessness becomes one more reason to migrate.

Anti-NGO Legislation Aims to Stop the Work of Civil Society Organizations

The closing of civic space intensified with legislation approved by corrupt Guatemalan legislators and signed into law by President Giammattei. In 2017, coinciding with attacks against the then still-existent CICIG, members of Guatemalan Congress [introduced legislative reforms](#) that served as the basis for the current NGO law (*Ley de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales para el Desarrollo y del Código Civil*). First introduced in February 2020, the NGO law went into effect in July 2021 after Guatemala's Constitutional Court struck down challenges to it and despite outcries from [international](#) and national [civil society](#) organizations. As United Nations and Organization of American States (OAS) experts [characterized](#) the impact of the law, "This is just the latest step in the erosion of civic space and the rule of law in the country, and has the

potential to reverse the legal advances made regarding freedom of expression. The changes introduced by this law risk choking the vital work of civil society."

The Guatemalan NGO Law

- Puts in place onerous new [requirements](#) for NGOs to register with the Guatemalan government within six months of its implementation, even if they have already registered previously, and requires NGOs, including independent media outlets and press organizations, to provide information on their foreign and national funding.
- Requires NGOs to identify as one of twelve "categories" of organizations established in the law, of which there are none relating to "human rights."
- Allows the government to place arbitrary limits on NGO activities, prosecute their directors, or to dissolve NGOs if they do not register and if they receive foreign funding and "disrupt the public order," without defining what this constitutes.
- Uses harsh and arbitrary criteria for closing NGOs; there are no [preventative measures](#) for NGOs to receive warnings first or notifications on the reasoning behind their closing, or opportunities for NGOs to have access to a court hearing to appeal their closing.

The NGO law is the result of a strategy to silence voices of dissent and undermine efforts of those organizations that have had an active role in promoting human rights and anti-corruption initiatives. It heightens risks for international organizations with staff in Guatemala monitoring human rights and providing protection to human rights defenders as they might be charged with supporting Guatemalan NGOs or civil society networks that have not registered under the law. The current regulatory framework of the law also may make it harder for the United States to partner with local organizations, presenting obstacles to reach important targets for USAID's "localization" strategy (increasing funding for local organizations) in Central America. The law intensifies risks for networks of organizations that are not registered as NGOs, such as Indigenous authorities and grassroots movements, because they do not draw their authority from being a formal organization. As the law has only been

in place for a year, its full impacts on NGOs and Indigenous authorities and movements, including U.S. development and humanitarian partners, have yet to be seen. Some organizations have already registered, but what will happen to these and others in the future if and when authorities move to investigate or dissolve organizations is unclear.

Shuttering of Institutions Protecting Human Rights

President Giammattei and the legislature have also taken steps to weaken [governmental institutions](#) dedicated to the protection of human rights and transitional justice from Guatemala's armed conflict, removing another layer of protection for human rights defenders, Indigenous communities, and victims of human rights violations.

There have been several attempts to stymie the work of the Human Rights Ombudsman Office (PDH) led by Jordán Rodas, whose term [ended](#) in August 2022, via death threats to him and efforts by the Guatemalan Congress to withhold the sufficient funding for the office to operate in 2021. Following these attacks, legislators have just [elected](#) José Alejandro Córdova as the new Human Rights Ombudsman for the period 2022-2027, beginning on August 20th, 2022. His selection has already raised concerns: Alejandro Córdova was [involved](#) in communicating with actors seeking to stack the courts with corrupt judges in 2020 in the "Parallel Commissions" case. The systematic attacks against former Ombudsman Rodas and the selection of Córdova as his replacement represent another way in which the corrupt network has coopted key institutions and organized to stop the work of a key institution providing support, monitoring, documentation, and protection to human rights defenders, including Indigenous communities. Human rights defenders have [reported](#) to international organizations that they have already felt the impact "of losing one of the last allies left in Guatemalan institutions." The replacement of Rodas with Córdova means that one of the last official voices denouncing human rights violations in the country will be silenced.

In 2020, Giammattei announced the merging of four institutions that had previously been dedicated to the protection of victims of human rights violations and the armed conflict, some founded as a part of the 1996 peace accords, including the Secretariat for Peace (SEPAZ), the National Reparations Program (PNR), the Presidential Coordinating Commission for the Executive's Policy on Human Rights (COPREDEH), and the Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs (SAA), which resolved territorial conflicts, into a single institution, the Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights (COPADEF). All four of these institutions, now closed, played a [fundamental role](#) in addressing the structural causes of the armed conflict and in providing justice to victims and their families. Victims from the armed conflict seeking justice for grave human rights violations, Indigenous communities pursuing cases related to land rights, and the organizations accompanying them have expressed [concern](#) about the lack of transparency with which these institutions were closed and what will happen to case files and archives previously held at these institutions. To date, COPADEF has failed to [maintain](#) a dialogue with civil society organizations and it is uncertain whether it will be able to assume the full responsibilities of the four closed institutions.

► [Limited areas of progress could now be unraveled and set back decades because of the co-optation of the courts.](#)

Criminalization of Human Rights Defenders, Indigenous Communities, and Journalists

According to Front Line Defenders, Guatemala and Honduras had the fourth highest killings of human rights defenders in Latin America, after Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil, and higher than Nicaragua in 2021. During 2021, the organization UDEFEGUA [registered](#) over 1,000 attacks against human rights defenders, of which 211 were directed towards justice operators. In 2022, the number of attacks have already reached [589](#) in the first six months of the year with the highest being considered attacks against justice

operators. If they continue at this pace, [attacks in 2022](#) will be close to a third higher than the worst years on record. Risks are heightened for environmental defenders—Global Witness [listed](#) Guatemala in the top ten countries in the world for the killings of environmental defenders in 2020.

A range of [strategies](#) are utilized to stigmatize and defame human rights defenders, Indigenous leaders, independent judges, prosecutors and journalists, prevent them from carrying out their work, and deny them access to fair trials and due process. These efforts are a vicious cycle meant to attack and wear down all aspects of a [person's identity](#)—professional, emotional, ethnic, gender, and personal. Oftentimes the names used to criminalize human rights defenders, Indigenous leaders, and journalists in the media, online, or in public rhetoric, are similar to [derogatory names](#) used by the ruling elite against Indigenous communities and those defending human rights during the time of Guatemala's armed conflict, reflecting how the same networks have responded when threatened. Digital harassment and surveillance are common, oftentimes from [trolls and bots related to official government accounts](#) and private actors such as the Foundation against Terrorism (FcT). The online attacks take a misogynistic tone, particularly towards women rights defenders. [Forty-five percent](#) of attacks documented by UDEFEGUA against human rights defenders in Guatemala

in the first six months of 2022 were against women human rights defenders, a sharp increase from previous years.

► [If \[attacks against human rights defenders\] continue at this pace, attacks in 2022 will be close to a third higher than the worst years on record.](#)

Human rights defenders, journalists, prosecutors, and justice operators face an [extraordinary number](#) of spurious, arbitrary charges and illegal detentions, oftentimes made [without any evidence](#). The individuals targeted are often held in pre-trial detention with excessive bail charges, making alternatives like house arrest rarely used. Led by Attorney General Consuelo Porras, and aided by FcT lawyers and corrupt actors, the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court have been stacked by prosecutors and other staff have been implicated in acts of corruption or in undermining democratic processes, including being designated on the Section 353 of the United States Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act in [July 2022](#) and [June 2021](#). This has meant that there is often no access to justice for criminalized human rights defenders, Indigenous communities, and journalists because the justice system itself is now completely rigged against them—from the very charges brought

Bernardo Caal Xol is an Indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' environmental defender, teacher, and union leader who was [recently released](#) following a strong national and international campaign for his freedom. He was imprisoned for five years because of his work defending the rights of his community in the face of a hydroelectric project impacting the Cahobón River in Alta Verapaz. There was [no evidence](#) of any of the charges brought against him, which were based solely on the testimonies of company workers. Bernardo states, "I never thought I would be criminalized or imprisoned because I've always respected the laws with my actions, and the only law we fight for is the right to be consulted."

María Magdalena Cuc Choc, an Indigenous Q'eqchi' environmental defender from El Estor, Izabal has just been [condemned](#) to two years in prison for charges brought by the Lisbal S.A. company in 2018 and related to her

work defending 58 displaced families of the Chab'íl Ch'och' community. She was accused of aggravated trespassing of a ranch and of injuring two people even though there was no evidence that she was [even in the location](#) where the alleged crime took place. Her trial was supposed to begin in November 2021 but was delayed arbitrarily until just recently.

Andrea González, a transgender woman and leader of the NGO Otrans Reinas de la Noche, was killed in Guatemala City in November 2021 after [reports](#) that she had been receiving threats due to her work and identity. Her murder occurred two days after another Otrans member, Ceci Ixpata, was beaten to death. LGBTQ+ organizations in Guatemala have pointed to a [regression](#) in the recognition and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity that intensified when President Giammattei issued an Executive Order cancelling a public school curriculum that taught sexual diversity.

against them which stem from this corrupt network of judges, prosecutors, private sector, and FcT lawyers to the irregularities and delays in the investigations, hearings, and procedures in their cases meant to ensure that the individuals will remain detained, in jail, or unable to do their work. External visits in prison are limited and sometimes prison transfers occur.

The lawyers defending human rights defenders and justice operators are also **attacked and threatened** and have limited access to case files as most of the information in the cases are declared confidential. Defenders and justice operators face serious violations to due process ranging from a **lack of investigation** into the charges brought against them to **irregularities** in their prosecution. Public access to hearings has also been restricted. In the few cases where some defenders are released after spending months or years in prison and the arbitrary charges are dropped, immense damage has already been done to people's lives, livelihoods, and well-being.

Co-optation of Courts Support Economic Interests and Criminalization of Indigenous Communities

The structural violence, exclusion, and racism that Indigenous communities have faced in Guatemala goes back hundreds of years to the time of Spanish colonization and the subsequent control of lands and resources by a ruling elite. Over the years and facing many challenges, Indigenous community leaders, with the support of international organizations, fought to present many cases to Guatemala's highest courts to defend the rights to their lands and to bring justice to victims and their families who suffered grave human rights violations during the armed conflict. Limited areas of progress could now be unraveled and set back decades because of the co-optation of the courts, oversight institutions and the Attorney General's Office by corrupt actors working together with members of the private sector, military elites, and security forces to maintain control of lands and resources and to avoid historic responsibility for human rights violations.

Under the leadership of magistrate Gloria Porras, Guatemala's Constitutional Court issued **several rulings**

Case of El Estor

The community of El Estor, located next to Guatemala's largest lake, Izabal, has **long faced** environmental harms and human rights violations from the Fénix nickel mine on its land. In 2020, under the leadership of Gloria Porras, the Constitutional Court **issued** a ruling responding to an injunction filed by a local fisherman's guild and ordering the Guatemalan subsidiary of the mine, Guatemalan Nickel Company (GNC), to stop its operations because it had **failed to conduct a consultation** with the Indigenous communities. Community leaders behind the challenge began to be criminalized.

The GNC and the Swiss-Russian conglomerate behind the company, the Solway Group, used a **variety of tactics** from 2016 through 2021 such as funding community infrastructure, and allegedly **bribing** community members, judges, mayors, journalists, religious leaders, and members of the Guatemalan National Civilian Police (PNC) to gain support for the mine and suppress opposition. One of the appellate court judges allegedly **side paid off** would eventually **side** with the company against Indigenous community leaders.

When the court ruling was supposed to go in effect in 2021, the Ministry of Energy and Mines began a consultation process which the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has since **described** as not meeting international standards and that excluded the fisherman's guild and other ancestral authorities. Because the GNC continued its operations in defiance of the Constitutional Court's ruling, community members took to the streets to protest peacefully again in October 2021. The response was a **swift crackdown by the PNC**, including over **700 police officers (for just some 120 protestors)** who used tear gas, conducted raids, and detained families. President Giammattei issued a state of siege for thirty days, restricting rights and the freedom of movement for the community in the area, although the ministry was allowed to continue a consultation process and declared that it had met the order in December 2021. Journalists covering the protests were also severely attacked (see more details on p. 7).

Before being removed from his post, Juan Francisco Sandoval, the head of the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI), was investigating the "magic carpet" case in which a witness **testified** that a Russian-owned mining company with connections to Solway Group had allegedly paid President Giammattei for access to a port in the city of Puerto Barrios. This port would **serve to transport nickel** from Lake Izabal abroad. The company received contracts in 2019 and 2021.

from 2011 to 2020 protecting Indigenous communities' rights to free, prior, and informed consent as enshrined under the ILO Convention No. 169, as well as their rights to their cultural identity, access to justice, freedom of expression, and sexual and reproductive rights. In April 2021, she was reelected as a Constitutional Court magistrate but **barred** from taking her seat on the court because of an illegal challenge presented by the Guatemalan Congress. "My vote has leaned towards not favoring corruption in the country and that has angered various actors, government officials, those connected to organized crime," she **stated** after fleeing to the United States to avoid an impending arrest warrant. The removal of judges like Gloria Porras has meant that coopted judges in the country's highest courts now have the blessing of Attorney General Consuelo Porras and the President to ignore previous rulings from Guatemala's Constitutional Court protecting the rights of these communities to be consulted on development projects and to violate

international standards that the Guatemalan government has ratified on free, prior, and informed consent, fueling displacement and evictions of Indigenous communities. In addition, the closing of the Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs (SAA) has **resulted** in stalled dialogues to resolve land conflicts or made them impossible, and has also led to more evictions of Indigenous communities.

Silencing Journalists Exposing Corruption and Human Rights Violations

Attacks against the press have targeted large media outlets and smaller, independent, and rural outlets and come from the highest levels of the Guatemalan state, including President Giammattei, who has verbally **accused** journalists of requesting private information about citizens with COVID-19, **questioned** their investigations, and restricted their access to government events and news conferences. These attacks are also part of a **pattern** of obstruction,

Attacks Against *elPeriódico*

Since 1996, *elPeriódico* has published articles highlighting cases of government corruption. In 2021, the Supreme Court of Justice **ordered** *elPeriódico* to be criminally investigated after it published allegations of corruption implicating Attorney General Porras. In late July 2022, the founder and president of *elPeriódico*, José Rubén Zamora, **was arrested** in his home with his family after his house and the offices of the newspaper were raided. Zamora has **won** international awards for his work and has **received** precautionary measures by the IACHR. Rafael Curruchiche, the head of the FECCI, ordered Zamora's arrest and that of FECCI prosecutor Samari Carolina Gomez Diaz, **charging** Zamora with **money laundering, blackmail, and influence peddling** and Gómez Diaz with the alleged **leaking of confidential information**. "This is a political persecution. I imagine that there must be a conspiracy," Zamora **said**. The Washington Post has **called** the charges against Zamora "spurious" and renowned author Francisco Goldman **wrote** in the New York Times that Zamora's situation "appears to be part of a crackdown by President Alejandro Giammattei of Guatemala on anti-corruption institutions and voices in the judicial system." The newspaper's bank accounts **were also frozen** at the request of the FECCI. Zamora and Gómez are both **detained** in the Mariscal Zavala military prison, where several of the people that *elPeriódico* has

investigated and denounced for acts of corruption are also imprisoned. They will spend at least **three months** in pre-trial detention on the basis of a single testimony and supposed evidence collected by the FECCI in just **72 hours**. There were efforts to limit access to information on the charges and to **delay** Zamora's case. The Public Prosecutor's Office has **announced** that the public, including journalists, will not be allowed to attend the proceedings against Zamora. The **European Union, U.S. State Department, national** and **international** human rights and press organizations denounced Zamora's arrest.

On August 19, Guatemala's Public Ministry ordered the arrest of the finance director, Flora Silva, of *elPeriodico*. As in the case of the newspaper's founder and director Rubén Zamora, Flora Silva's home was raided prior to her arrest. The **statement** by *elPeriodico* points out that Silva's arrest followed the same pattern as Zamora's—authorities used vehicles with **covered license plates** and unnecessary, extensive raids carried out at the latest possible hour on a Friday. Flor Silva was informed of her arrest hours **after** the raid on her house, in violation of the Constitution, which states that authorities must provide notification of an arrest warrant before beginning any such procedure.

harassment, and online attacks that began under former President Jimmy Morales and intensified with the closing of the CICIG. The intent of the attacks against journalists is to create “silence zones where fear results in very little to no coverage of human rights violations or corruption,” according to the George W. Bush Presidential Center.

The U.S. State Department [notes](#) in its 2021 Human Rights report on Guatemala, “The intimidation of journalists increased during the year and resulted in significant self-censorship.” [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Expression](#) and [United Nations High Commission for Human Rights](#) have all expressed concern about the worsening climate of hostility and attacks towards journalists in the last two years and as recently as [September 2022](#). According to the Guatemalan Association of Journalists, there have been [350 attacks](#) against the press during President Giammattei’s administration. The Press Freedom Observatory of the newspaper Prensa Comunitaria reported 96 attacks on journalists and media outlets in the first six months of 2022. Institutions meant to investigate attacks against journalists are also targeted—the Special Prosecutor’s Office for Crimes Against Journalists has been the [target](#) of surveillance.

Repeated attacks against the media outlet elPeriódico demonstrate the lengths to which the Guatemalan government is going to silence national and international journalists investigating cases of corruption but there are also many other cases to demonstrate this. Guatemalan journalist Juan Luis Font was recently forced to leave the country because he was charged with [unlawfully associating](#) with anti-corruption judge Erika Aifán. CNN en Español journalist [Michelle Mendoza](#) was also forced to leave the country due to repeated attacks against her. Risks are [heightened](#) for independent and Indigenous journalists reporting in rural areas on issues related to the environment and the rights of Indigenous communities and for women journalists. Journalists [covering government protests](#) in 2020 faced excessive use of force by Guatemalan security forces, and were [beaten](#), detained, and criminalized.

Indigenous radio journalist [Anastasia Mejía](#), first charged with sedition and arson and detained in 2021 for her [coverage](#) of protests against the mayor of the town of Joyabaj, was later released without charges. The IACHR Special Rapporteur for the Freedom of Expression states that threats on social networks towards women journalists must be [considered](#) as “elements of gender-based violence” by the Guatemalan government.

Indigenous Maya Q’eqchi’ journalists [Juan Bautista Xol](#), [Baudilio Choc](#) and [Carlos Choc](#) of the Prensa Comunitaria were [attacked](#) for covering the protests in October 2021 in El Estor, Izabal and had charges brought against them. Their [homes were raided](#), they were harassed to stop filming and their equipment was confiscated by police officers. A criminal court judge in Puerto Barrios, in the department of Izabal, issued the arrest warrant for Choc based on a complaint from 13 police officers who accused the journalist of “instigation to commit a crime” after he reported on the October 2021 demonstration in El Estor. According to the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), “Carlos Choc faced criminal charges simply for being one of the few reporters documenting the state response to demonstrations.” Carlos Choc was freed from detention and the [two charges](#) he was facing were [dropped](#).

Journalists [Marvin del Cid](#) and [Sonny Figueroa](#) received several threats for their investigation into the misuse of President Giammattei’s campaign funds in the 2019 presidential election, resulting in del Cid having to [leave](#) the country in August 2021.

► [There have been 350 attacks against the press during President Giammattei’s administration.](#)

Faced with a bias from the Attorney General’s office and the country’s highest courts, a shuttering of institutions protecting human rights, and anti-NGO legislation, the criminalization of human rights defenders, Indigenous communities, and journalists will only continue in the coming months and years. If the corrupt network continues to exercise its power with the support of the three branches of government in Guatemala, the closing of civic space will continue to grow and expand at the expense of those seeking change in their country.

U.S. Policy Recommendations

- ❶ Raise with the Guatemalan government the urgency of respecting freedom of expression and association for human rights defenders, Indigenous activists, trade unionists, journalists, and others, including by ending false or excessive legal cases against them.
- ❷ Denounce attacks, threats, and false or excessive legal cases and lack of due process against human rights defenders, journalists including from small community media, and Indigenous leaders. U.S. policymakers have been outspoken regarding attacks against justice operators, which is crucial, but far less frequently have spoken out regarding similar attacks on human rights defenders and especially against Indigenous community leaders and community journalists. A clear and cohesive interagency approach is needed on this from the U.S. government.
- ❸ Express concern to the Guatemalan government regarding the NGO law and urge ending onerous registration requirements, removing the Guatemalan government's broad authority to dissolve organizations who are found to have used foreign funding for "activities that alter the public order in the national territory," and immediately clarifying civil society registration requirements. Ensure that the State Department and USAID consult with international and Guatemalan civil society organizations to assess the full impact of the NGO law on the operations of civil society organizations in Guatemala, including on organizations' capacity to access foreign and U.S. funding and to what extent they will impact USAID's ability to direct twenty-five percent of assistance to local partners under the agency's global localization goals.
- ❹ Ensure that the State Department and USAID adequately fund and effectively carry out initiatives to protect and defend civic space in Guatemala as a part of broader efforts in Central America, such as the announced interagency Voces (Voices) initiative, and to ensure that these include the following two programs implemented by organization(s) with human rights expertise: (a) a program to provide long-term support, including financial and psychological support, for justice operators, human rights defenders, trade union leaders, and journalists forced into exile from Central America and (b) a binational legal assistance program, including U.S. and Guatemalan lawyers, to defend justice operators, human rights defenders, and journalists who have been falsely criminalized.
- ❺ Ensure all U.S. government initiatives or initiatives closely coordinating with the U.S. government, such as the Partnership for Central America (PCA), that promote U.S. investment in Guatemala have safeguards and transparency to screen out investment that violate labor rights, undermines Indigenous community rights, or benefits corrupt actors.
- ❻ Engage with the inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and FATF-style regional bodies to express concern regarding use of anti-money laundering and counterterrorism regulatory standards as justification for restrictions on legitimate civil society activity and encourage incorporation of robust civic space criteria in all FATF monitoring activities. The U.S. government should communicate the need for incorporating shrinking civic space considerations in FATF Plenary and Working Group meetings and with a broad range of stakeholders.