

Guatemala: Over 100 organizations and coalitions demand justice and reparation in Hogar Seguro case

Guatemala City/Geneva - With court proceedings starting today to determine the criminal responsibility of three high-ranking civil servants in the gruesome deaths of 41 teenagers, 117 organisations are calling for justice in one of the worst cases of human rights violations against children in Latin America.

On 8 March 2017, 41 teenage girls burned to death and another 15 survived with serious wounds, including amputations, at a home for children called Virgen de la Asunción - also known as the "Hogar Seguro" - on the outskirts of Guatemala City. The girls had been locked in a small classroom the whole night by police and the management of the home, in cramped conditions and without water. This came as punishment for an attempted escape the day before to flee routinely inflicted severe abuse, including of a sexual nature. After their capture, the girls had been beaten with sticks, police shields and electric batons, pepper sprayed and forced to lie on the ground facedown while handcuffed.

As the fire, set by the teenagers in a desperate attempt to attract attention, engulfed the room, the policewoman in charge refused to open the door for nine minutes.

According to information from Guatemalan NGOs, the legal process to try those responsible has been flawed for the start, including by the opening of three distinct investigations into the same case and by multiple delays- This has further deepened the suffering of the survivors and of the victims' families.

Of serious concern is also the fact that the three people accused - including two who were working at the Presidency of Guatemala at the time of the deaths - are only charged with minor offenses. Last December, the UN Committee Against Torture had shared its concerns "about the qualification of the facts as minor offenses, without taking into account the intimidation as a possible objective, the absence of investigation around the allegations of abuse, sexual abuse and trafficking in the said centre" and urged Guatemala to "investigate promptly, exhaustively and impartially all allegations of homicide, torture, abuse, sexual abuse and child and teenager trafficking on those placed at the Virgen de la Asunción home" (CAT/C/GTM/7).

Given all this, it is highly concerning that neither the survivors of the fire nor any of the victims' families have received any care or reparations. Worse, the Public Ministry has recently open an investigation against one of the surviving girls, accusing her of being responsible of the events on 7 and 8 March 2017, in line with constant arguments from the lawyers of the defendants, who keep putting the blame on the girls and on their families. The survivors are further being retraumatized by repeated questioning during the three distinct investigation processes, which also expose them to threats and potentially to attacks against their physical integrity.

The undersigned civil society organisations urge the relevant Guatemalan authorities to:

- Guarantee the personal security of all surviving victims, witnesses and family members in a context of threats, harassment, intimidation and defamation;
- Apply international human rights standards and the recommendations of international organisations, together with relevant domestic legislation, to the investigation and judiciary processes, with the best interest of the girls in mind;
- Refrain from retraumatizing the survivors, and abstain from having them speak repeatedly about the same events;
- Establish the facts and determine criminal responsibility by creating a unified procedure, and take urgent measures to avoid further delays;
- Open the court proceedings to the public, which is not the case currently.

It is high time for justice to be done. There is no other way to put an end to impunity and avoid the repetition of such tragic events elsewhere in Guatemala.

The Litigators Group against Torture in Latin America was established in April 2019. It is comprised of 17 civil society organisations from 10 Latin American countries and of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and aims to fight, collectively, torture and impunity in the region via a global approach to litigation.

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List of signatories

Organisations belonging to the Litigators Group against Torture in Latin America:

- 1. Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (Frayba) - Mexico**
- 2. Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (Centro Prodh) - Mexico**
- 3. Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte, AC - Mexico**
- 4. Centro de Estudios Sociales y Legales (CELS) - Argentina**
- 5. Centro de Prevención, Tratamiento y Rehabilitación de víctimas de la Tortura y sus Familiares (CPTRT) - Honduras**
- 6. Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (CCJ) - Colombia**
- 7. Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos de Honduras (COFADEH) - Honduras**
- 8. Comité de Familiares de las Víctimas de los sucesos ocurridos entre el 27 de febrero y los primeros días de marzo de 1989 (COFAVIC) - Venezuela**
- 9. Comisión de Derechos Humanos (COMISEDH) - Peru**
- 10. Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, A.C. (CMDPDH) - Mexico**
- 11. Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos del Paraguay (CODEHUPY) - Paraguay**
- 12. Documenta, Análisis y Acción para la Justicia Social, A.C. (Documenta) - Mexico**
- 13. Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con Presos Políticos (FCSP) - Colombia**
- 14. Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas" (IDHUCA) - El Salvador**
- 15. Mujeres Transformando el Mundo (MTM) - Guatemala**
- 16. Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH) - Guatemala**
- 17. Observatorio Ciudadano - Chile**
- 18. Organización Mundial Contra la Tortura (OMCT) - Switzerland**
- 19. " Xumek" Asociación para la promoción y protección de los Derechos Humanos - Argentina**

Organizations from Guatemala:

20. ASOL (Guatemala)
21. Asociación de Mujeres Alas de Mariposas (Guatemala)
22. SITRADOMSA (Guatemala)
23. SINETS (Guatemala)
24. Asociación Ixoqib' MIRIAM (Guatemala)
25. Asociación Colectivo N'oj (Guatemala)
26. Alianza de Mujeres y Mujeres Indígenas por el Acceso a la Justicia (Guatemala)
27. Muvacofum (Guatemala)
28. Cambridge (Guatemala)
29. Asociación Profesionales Mayas Kembal Noj (Guatemala)
30. FADS (Guatemala)
31. Centro de Estudios de Guatemala
32. DEMOS (Guatemala)
33. AMES (Guatemala)
34. Asociación Mujeres en Solidaridad (Guatemala)
35. Asociación de Abogadas Indígenas Chomija' (Guatemala)
35. ATRAHDOM (Guatemala)
36. INCIDE Joven (Guatemala)
37. Asociación Política La Cuerda (Guatemala)
38. Platafoma Tejedoras del Güipil (Guatemala)
39. Alianza Estratégica de Mujeres Cedaw (Guatemala)
40. Agenda Global de Mujeres Indígenas (Guatemala)

41. Red de Mujeres Afrodescendientes (Guatemala)
42. Red de Mujeres lindigenas por la salud de las Mujeres (Guatemala)
43. Red Nacional de Mujeres con Diversas Discapacidades (Guatemala)
44. Red de Mujeres de Petén (Guatemala)
45. Red de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos de Petén (Guatemala)
45. Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos, Guatemala - UDEFEGUA - (Guatemala)
46. La Otra Cooperativa de Mujeres Petén (Guatemala)
47. Asociación de Mujeres Ixqik (Guatemala)
48. Asociación de Mujeres Aq'ab'al (Guatemala)
49. Cooperativa de Mujeres Agua Viva, Petén (Guatemala)
50. Comité de Mujeres Los Rosales (Guatemala)
51. Comité de Mujeres Activas, Petén (Guatemala)
52. Asociación Mujer Tejedoras del Desarrollo (AMUTED) (Guatemala)
53. Asociación de Mujeres de Occidente Ixquic (Guatemala)
54. Asociación de Mujeres de Petén Ixqik (Guatemala)
55. Asociación Vidas Paralelas (Guatemala)
56. Asociación de Mujeres Empleadas y Desempleadas Unidas contra la Violencia (Guatemala)
57. Asociación las Crisálidas de Villa Nueva (Guatemala)
58. Asociación Política de Mujeres Mayas MOLOJ (Guatemala)
59. Asociación Trans Reinas de la Noche (Guatemala)
60. Organización de Mujeres Afroamérica 21 (Guatemala)
61. Asociación Gente Positiva (Guatemala)
62. Casa de la Cultura 4 de Noviembre LGBTIQ (Guatemala)
63. Oficina para la Diversidad Sexual y de Género Alta Verapaz (Guatemala)
64. Trabajando Unidos Huehuetenango (Guatemala)

65. Refugio con Visión Diversa Quiché (Guatemala)
66. Grupo Multidisciplinario por la Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos (Guatemala)
67. Familiares de Víctimas del Diario Militar (Guatemala)
68. Plataforma Internacional contra la Impunidad (Guatemala)
69. Majawil Q'ij (Guatemala)
70. ASOGEN (Guatemala)
71. Pastoral de la Mujer VAP (Guatemala)
72. IEPADES (Guatemala)
73. Union Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas UNAMG (Guatemala)
74. ONG Guatemaltecos Unidos para el Progreso de Guatemala UNIPROGUA (Guatemala)
75. Asociación de Vecinos de Chicoyoguito de Coban Alta Verapaz AVECHAV (Guatemala)
76. H.I.J.O.S. Guatemala (Guatemala)
77. Central de Organizaciones Indígenas Campesinas Ch'ort'í Nuevo Día (Guatemala)
78. Red de Transformación Guatemalteca RTG (Guatemala)
79. Resistencia Pacífica La Puya (Guatemala)
80. Grupo de Mujeres Ixchel (Guatemala)
81. Rebeca Lane - Somos Guerreras- (Guatemala)
82. Go Joven Guatemala (Guatemala)

Organizations across the region and globe, including international organizations

83. Asociación de Mujeres de Guatemala -AMG- (Spain)
84. Guatemala Human Rights Defenders Project (Washington, USA)
85. Colectiva Feminista MAPAS (Michoacan- Mexico)
86. Mujeres Transformando Mundos A.c. (Chiapas-México)

87. Centro de Educación Integral de Base Chiapas (Mexico)
88. Maritimes - Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (Canada)
89. Colectivo Miradas Criticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo (Spain)
90. Colectivo Miradas Criticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo (Mexico)
91. Colectivo Miradas Criticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo (Ecuador)
92. Colectivo Miradas Criticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo (Peru)
93. Colectivo Miradas Criticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo (Argentina)
94. Colectivo Miradas Criticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo (Uruguay)
95. Campaña 28 de Septiembre para América Latina y el Caribe.
96. Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Argentina)
97. Proyecto Generar (Argentina)
98. Centro de Apoyo Solidario, Documentación y Estudio, A.C. (Yucatán- México).
99. Peace Watch Switzerland (Switzerland)
100. Centro de Atención Psicosocial (Peru)
101. Fundación Ecuménica para el Desarrollo y la Paz -FEDEPAZ- (Peru)
102. Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social -CEAS- (Perú)
103. Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos -CNDDHH- (Peru)
104. Grupo de Trabajo contra la Tortura de la CNDDHH (Perú)
105. Coalición Colombiana contra la Tortura - CCCT - (Colombia)
106. Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca A.C. (Mexico)
107. ACI PARTICIPA (Honduras)
108. Comisión de Justicia, Paz e Integridad de la Creación, Provincia Franciscana Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Centroamérica y Panamá
109. Comisión Internacional de Juristas (CIJ)
110. Melel Xojobal A.C. (Mexico)
111. Movimiento Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes Trabajadores (MOLACNNATS)

- 112. Mujeres Transformando Mundos A.C. (Chiapas-Mexico)
- 113. Peace Watch Switzerland (Switzerland)
- 114. Plataforma Internacional contra la Impunidad
- 115. Proyecto Generar (Argentina)
- 116. Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Mexico - REDIM (Mexico)
- 117. Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos - Red TDT (Mexico)