

Guatemala: Strike and Crisis

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A NATIONAL STRIKE led by Indigenous Guatemalans, as well as an institutional crisis over the peremptory firing of anti-corruption prosecutor Juan Francisco Sandoval, are shaking that Central American country.



Sandoval, forced to flee the country after his firing, has been investigating corruption linked to Guatemalan president Alejandro Giammattei.

Sandoval has been replaced by Rafael Curruchiche, who previously served as an Electoral Crimes prosecutor. In that capacity Curruchiche refused to issue an arrest warrant against former president Jimmy Morales, and more recently moved to arrest anti-corruption figures Juan Solorzano and Anibal Arguello.

Successive U.S. administrations have been pretty indifferent to rampant corruption and atrocities in Guatemala, particularly during the genocidal counterinsurgency war of the 1970s and '80s, but the Biden administration appears to be concerned at least with appearances.

“Guatemalan Attorney General Consuelo Porras’ July 23rd decision to remove Special Prosecutor Against Impunity, or FECI, Chief Juan Francisco Sandoval fits a pattern of behavior that indicates a lack of commitment to the rule of law and independent judicial and prosecutorial processes,” said a U.S. State Department spokesperson. “As a result, we have lost confidence in the attorney general” and her intention to combat corruption.

Some U.S. visa restrictions have been placed on Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran officials whom the State Department “believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy or the rule of law.”

There was no indication that Porras has been affected by widespread international criticism, or that much of anything will change while U.S.-Guatemalan military ties remain intact.

Responding to Sandoval’s firing and other abuses including corruption in the provision of COVID vaccines, Indigenous leaders called a national strike on July 29 over the government’s corruption and the rule of economic elites, the military, and drug traffickers at the expense of the population’s lives and dignity.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of August a new law went into effect sharply limiting the work of NGOs, potentially criminalizing human rights defenders.

See: "Tensions Escalate as Guatemalan Attorney General Remains Defiant and National Strike Continues," Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, August 6, 2021.

P.S.

- Against the Current No. 214, September/October 2021:
<https://againstthecurrent.org/atc214/guatemala-strike-and-crisis/>