

EU Imposes Sanctions on Attorney General and Four Others On February 2, the European Union announced [sanctions](#) on Attorney General Consuelo Porras; Secretary General of the Public Ministry Angel Pineda; head of the Special Prosecutor’s Office Against Impunity, Rafael Curruchiche; Judge Fredy Orellana; and attorney Leonor Eugenia Morales. The EU said the individuals were being sanctioned for “undermining democracy, the rule of law, and the peaceful change of power in Guatemala.” According to the announcement, “The assets of the affected individuals are frozen and citizens and EU companies are prohibited from providing them with financial resources. In addition, they are subject to a travel restriction that prevents them from entering the EU territory or passing through.” The EU in early January adopted a special framework for restrictive measures to support democracy and a peaceful and orderly transfer of power in Guatemala in the run-up to the inauguration of President Bernardo Arévalo, held on January 14. Consuelo Porras has threatened to sue the EU.

President Arévalo Files Charges Against Attorney General Consuelo Porras

A battle of wills between President Bernardo Arévalo and Attorney General Consuelo Porras has characterized the first two months of Arévalo’s term. On March 1, after tense weeks of disagreement, the Arévalo administration [filed charges](#) against Porras and asked that her immunity be lifted. The Supreme Court will consider the request to lift her immunity.

Immediately upon assuming the presidency, Arévalo began confronting Porras, who is [widely regarded](#) as [corrupt](#). In his first week as president, by means of a [letter](#), he requested a meeting with Porras and asked for a report on several policies and cases. These included the progress in criminal cases that the Inter-American Court had ordered investigated; the criteria used for criminal prosecution in cases linked to freedom of speech and the press; the protocol for action in response to protective measures issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; and the investigation into the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines. In his letter, Arévalo specified that the meeting would take place on January 24. On January 22, attorney and former member of Congress Fernando Linares filed a [request for an injunction](#) before the Constitutional Court, claiming that for the president to call the attorney general to a meeting was an abuse. Linares’ request further stated that if Porras complied with what the president was asking, she would be committing the crime of “revelation of secrets.” On January 24, the day the meeting was supposed to take place, Attorney General Porras released a recorded [statement](#). In it, she said that, in response to [public calls](#) for her resignation, she would not resign but would serve out the full four years of her term, of which two remain. She also said that the president could not give instructions on criminal investigations to the Public Ministry and that meeting with him to discuss cases would be illegal. She promised that she would give a public report on the cases he asked about in his letter. Later in the day, Secretary General of the Public Ministry Angel Pineda released the requested [report](#), but it contained no information about particular cases. Pineda said in the report that only those involved in cases had a right to see the files. He added that the attorney general is only required to make a public report on her activities once a year to the citizens of Guatemala, with a copy to the president, and that to know more about the issues the Public Ministry has been working on, the President Arévalo should consult the website.

Arévalo countered by scheduling a [meeting](#) with all the ministers in his cabinet on January 29 and noting that the law required Porras' presence. Porras attended that meeting but left after about 15 minutes, arguing that it would be illegal for her to stay. She then issued an [invitation](#) to the president to meet on February 7. Arévalo sent his [Minister of Interior](#) to the meeting in his stead and made it clear that he was [considering](#) what legal action he could take against Porras for having left the cabinet meeting soon after it started.

Arévalo Administration Files Charges Against Secretary General of the Public Ministry

The Arévalo administration on March 7 [filed a complaint](#) with the Office of the Comptroller General of Accounts against Ángel Pineda, who works under Attorney General Consuelo Porras as Secretary General of the Public Ministry. The complaint alleges that Pineda and former president Alejandro Giammattei may have misused public funds when they hired a US law firm to assist in the political persecution of Guatemalans in exile in the United States. In November 2021, Pineda reportedly advised Giammattei to hire a law firm to “defend the interests of the government” in light of statements made on social media by former prosecutors who had fled into exile. The Giammattei administration hired the firm Greenberg Trauring at a cost of more than \$59,000 per month, paid out in 2021 and 2022.

Arévalo's Party Remains Suspended but Congressional Alliance Holds When Arévalo, of the Semilla party, was inaugurated as Guatemala's president on January 15, along with Vice President Karin Herrera, it was with a delay of more than nine hours, as Congress wrangled over the status of the Semilla party and disputed the composition of the governing board of Congress. At around 11:00 PM, former president Alejandro Giammattei—who has now been [denied a visa](#) for the United States, due to well-founded evidence of corruption—turned the office over to the Guatemalan Congress rather than to Arévalo, saying he feared that midnight, the deadline for him to transfer power, would arrive without the transition. He did not appear at the inauguration. Arévalo was sworn in by Semilla lawmaker Samuel Pérez, who had been elected president of the congressional governing board. That election for president of Congress would be repeated on January 19; the Constitutional Court, in response to legal action that followed Pérez' election, [ruled](#) that because the Semilla party [was suspended](#) in July by order of a judge, Semilla lawmakers had to be considered independents and therefore could not hold leadership positions in Congress. The Constitutional Court confirmed in late January that Semilla representatives would have to continue as independents.

On January 19, the election for the leadership of Congress was repeated, and Nery Ramos y Ramos, of the Azul party, was elected to head the Guatemalan Congress' governing board. Ramos had been director of the National Civil Police from 2015 to 2018. He was dismissed by former Interior Minister Enrique Degenhart. The US embassy praised his tenure, calling Ramos “a valued partner of the US” under whose leadership a significant decrease in the homicide rate was achieved, along with improvements in community policing and school safety and the creation of new tools to combat crime and improve citizen security.” While Semilla has only [23 representatives](#) in Congress and no status as a party, the alliances that had allowed Pérez to initially be elected as president continue to be strong. No members of former president Giammattei's Vamos party were elected to the [governing board](#).

Arévalo's Cabinet Includes Women but Lacks Proportional Indigenous Representation

Arévalo's [cabinet of ministers](#) consists of six women and eight men. Only one ministry, however—the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare—will be headed by an Indigenous person (Miriam Roquel Chávez), in spite of the fact that the Indigenous comprise around half of the population. The indigenous authorities of the 48 cantons of Totonicapán [urged](#) the new government to take into account in the course of the next 100 days Indigenous professionals to staff the agencies that most affect their development, such as education, health, agriculture, mines, and natural resources and the environment.

Guatemala Extends 3-Year Mandate to Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights

For the first time in years, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala (UNHCHR) has been given a three-year mandate. Under the administration of former president Alejandro Giammattei, the UN office was given one-year extensions, severely restricting human rights officials' ability to make long-range plans for the office.

Government Reaches Accord with Indigenous on Plan to Address Land Conflicts

After holding discussions with several campesino and Indigenous organizations, the Arévalo administration in February announced a [plan](#) to address land conflicts and facilitate access to land. The joint accord, which lays out actions to be taken with the first hundred days of government, was reached after a series of dialogues with groups focused on land and territory rights, including the Campesino Unity Committee (CUC), the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA), the New Day Chorti Campesino Central Coordinator, and the Verapaz Union of Campesino Organizations (UVOC).

The Agrarian Agreement seeks to promote the progress and wellbeing of campesino communities through measures that simplify and promote access to land and aims to be an instrument that anticipates and resolves agrarian conflicts. Among the measures proposed is the creation of a mechanism, under the responsibility of the Private Secretariat of the Presidency, to deal with urgent and accumulated conflicts. According to data from the Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights, there are currently more than 1,500 cases of active [agrarian conflicts](#) in the country. To address the issue of access to land, the Land Fund (Fontierra) will be strengthened, thus broadening the sources of funding for land. The fund will also be restructured and Indigenous and campesino representatives will serve on its board of directors. Regarding land conflicts, Arévalo said they would be addressed one by one to find solution agreeable to all.

Guatemala Is Tied with Iraq and Honduras for Perceived Corruption According to Transparency International's [Corruption Perception Index](#), Guatemala fell ten points from 2012 to 2023, ranking it alongside Iraq and Honduras in terms of perceived corruption, and just below Bangladesh and the Central African Republic. Guatemala ranks 154th in the index of 180 countries.

Peace Brigades International Calls for Public Policy to Protect Defenders

Speaking before the United Nations Human Rights Council in early March, PBI's Geneva representative [noted](#) that 5,900 attacks against defenders were reported by UDEFEGUA in 2023. PBI urged UN member states to support the new government of Guatemala in the development of a public policy for the protection of human rights defenders. The policy should be carried out with trained personnel and with the resources to implement the policy across the country, including in rural areas. PBI also stressed the importance of calling on the Attorney General's office to stop criminalizing defenders and to investigate attacks against them.

HONDURAS

Former President Juan Orlando Hernández Convicted of Drug-Related Charges On March 8, a jury in a federal court in New York found Honduras' former president, Juan Orlando Hernández, [guilty](#) of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States and of possessing and conspiring to possess "destructive devices," including machine guns. He faces a mandatory prison term of at least 40 years. He will be sentenced in July. Evidence was based mainly on the testimony of witnesses, including a Honduran drug investigator and former drug traffickers. According to the evidence, Hernández took large bribes from drug cartels to fund his political campaigns and in exchange protected and facilitated the transfer through the country of drugs bound for the United States.

Two Journalists Murdered On January 28, journalist Luis Alonso Teruel was murdered in Atima, Santa Barbara. According to the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (CPJ), Teruel was [traveling in a vehicle](#) with his 11-year-old son when two unidentified individuals intercepted him, [took him out of the vehicle](#), and [shot him](#) multiple times. He was the host of a political program on a local TV channel, Pecaligüe TV. The attack may have been related to reports Teruel and Pecaligüe's team were doing on deforestation in the area, according to information collected by CPJ.

Teruel's murder occurred just over a month after the murder of Francisco Ramírez, a journalist murdered by apparent hitmen in Danlí, El Paraiso, on December 22, despite having protective measures from the National Protection Mechanism for Journalists and Human Rights Defenders. His police escort was wounded in the shooting. Ramírez had been attacked in the same area last May and therefore had received protective measures. He had a request for political asylum in another country pending at the time of his murder. The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Honduras called for stronger protective measures for journalists.

Spokesman of Cooperative in Trujillo Abducted and Disappeared Jose Abel López, the spokesman of the Remolino Cooperative, in Trujillo, Colón, was [abducted](#) by heavily armed, masked men on January 30, as he was driving on the highway with other members of the cooperative. His whereabouts remain unknown.

Guapinol Community Asks Government Not to Renew License of Illegal Mine

The Municipal Committee in Defense of Common and Public Goods of Tocoa (CMDBCPT) and the Agrarian Platform of the Aguán have asked the Xiomara Castro administration not to renew the license for an open pit nickel mine that has caused conflict, arbitrary detentions, murders, and environmental degradation in Tocoa, Colón. The license was granted to Emco Mining (now Inversiones Los Pinares) on January 28, 2014, in spite of the mine's location within a protected national park. The license expired at the end of January. The community learned in October 2023 that Inversiones Los Pinares intended to renew the concession contract for up to 30 more years. In a communique, the CMDBCPT and the Agrarian Platform pointed out that the municipal and central government should respect the sovereign decision of the people of the municipality of Tocoa, which have repeatedly expressed opposition to the mine. The environmental defenders have come under increasing stigmatization in the local media in recent days.

Honduras Has the Highest Rate of Femicides in Latin America According to Alice Shackelford, director of the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Honduras, Honduras is the country with the highest rate of femicides in Latin America. Shackelford made the remark in a press conference following the murder of three women on the island of Roatán. Sixty-six percent of femicides are carried out with firearms, according to a [report](#) released by the Autonomous University of Honduras. Shackelford, [citing](#) the report in a post on X, called for a change in gun legislation in Honduras. In the last three years, of the 1,014 femicides reported to the Public Ministry, only 29 have been successfully prosecuted. Women's groups are asking the interim authorities in the Public Ministry to make progress in these investigations. Sixteen women were murdered in the first 15 days of 2024. In 2023, the Secretariat of Security registered 380 femicides.

Justice is Delayed in Keyla Martínez Rodríguez Murder Case Convicted of the murder of Keyla Martínez, a nursing student strangled in a police station cell in 2021, National Police Officer Jarol Perdomo has been sentenced to four years in prison and a year of community service, along with a fine of \$314. Perdomo was the only police officer prosecuted for the [murder](#), which took place in Esperanza, Intibucá, after Martínez was arrested for being out after curfew.

Norma Rodríguez, the victim's mother, denounced the sentence as evidence that the Honduran judicial system doesn't value life.

Honduran Congress Resumes Sessions After 147 days without sessions, the National Congress returned to extraordinary meetings on January 16, after the Libre party obtained a simple majority through an agreement established with representatives of the Liberal Party and the Salvador Party of Honduras, as well as the Christian Democrat Party (which has one representative), the Anti-Corruption Party (one representative), and one independent. Libre thus was able to ensure the integration of a new congressional board of directors (2024-2026) that is more representative of varied interests. Through this multi-party agreement, from which only the National Party was left out, Libre obtained the necessary simple majority (73 votes) to ensure its immediate legislative agenda, including the approval of the 2024 general budget and different amnesty laws.

Supreme Court Orders Detention Colonel for Five Post-Electoral Killings in 2017

Colonel Víctor Alonso Ponce Martínez, accused of the homicide in the cases of five people during protests following the presidential election of 2017, was [arrested](#) in February. According to the investigation conducted by the Public Ministry, on December 1, 2017, a group of residents were protesting on a street in the López Arellano neighborhood of San Pedro Sula. Colonel Ponce Martínez, who commanded 172 Military Police of the Public Order, arrived in the area with the purpose of evicting the protesters, and the Military Police used live fire, killing Víctor Evelio Martínez Álvarez, Roger Alberto Vázquez Reyes, José David Ramos Lamber, Mauricio Jonathan Echeverría and Michael Jair Ponce Saucedo. Ponce Martínez was eventually acquitted of the crime of homicide because the prosecutor's office could not prove he ordered his troops to open fire. Nonetheless, he has been [sentenced](#) for other crimes, including evidence tampering (he moved the bodies of the victims) and falsifying reports about the incident.

Henry Bonilla is Acquitted of Setting Fire to US Embassy in 2019 Henry Bonilla, a student charged with setting fire to tires stacked at the US Embassy's doorway in 2019 during a protest, has been acquitted of all charges for lack of evidence against him. For this story and other stories of success for human rights defenders, [see](#) PBI UK's compendium of good news.

For more news and context on Guatemala, [follow PBI Guatemala](#) on Facebook for the latest news. For more news on Honduras, [follow](#) PBI Honduras on X.

[Peace Brigades International](#) is a nongovernmental organization that sends teams of international observers to areas of conflict and repression to provide protective accompaniment to human rights defenders whose lives and work are under threat. Founded in 1981, with its first project in Guatemala, PBI has worked in fourteen countries and on four continents. PBI's international office in Brussels and advocacy staff in Geneva and around the world support efforts in the field to open space for peace and for the defense of human rights.
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