

His Excellency Bernardo Arévalo  
President of the Republic of Guatemala  
Casa Presidencial de Guatemala  
A, 6A Avenida 4-18, Ciudad de Guatemala  
GUATEMALA

August 4, 2024

Dear President Arévalo:

We are deeply distressed about the conviction of former public prosecutor **Virginia Laparra**, former head of the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI). She had been unfairly held in preventive detention for almost two years after she was arrested while leaving her office in Quezaltenango on February 23, 2022 (cf our letter 22 DEC 2022). On July 8—without sufficient evidence or due process of law—a judge in Quetzaltenango convicted Virginia Laparra of disclosure of confidential information and sentenced her to five years in prison (commutable at the rate of 5 quetzales per day) and a fine of 50,000 quetzales (approximately US\$6,500). In addition, the conviction bars her from practicing law for five years and disqualifies her from holding public office for ten years.

Many domestic and international court-watchers agree that the criminal proceedings were a farce. The entire judicial process relied on a single piece of evidence that does not clearly prove that Virginia Laparra had any intention to commit harm. Amnesty International (which declared Virginia Laparra a prisoner of conscience on November 28, 2022) documented violations of her right to defense and undue pressure put on her legal team. We stand alongside Amnesty International, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and other organizations expressing deep concern about the judicial proceedings and her unjust conviction.

As head of the FECI, Virginia Laparra had led investigations into corruption and large-scale crime. Her conviction on July 8 is part of an ongoing pattern of criminalization of human rights defenders, journalists and others who have been fighting against corruption and impunity to make the mechanisms of justice possible. (It is worth noting that the current attorney general, María Consuelo Porras Argueta, has been sanctioned for corruption by the United States and over 40 other countries for misusing her position to persecute and obtain exemplary punishment against anti-corruption advocates.) Because of the ongoing climate of persecution of anti-corruption law defenders, Virginia Laparra announced on July 18 that she would flee the country. Her exile means that she will join more than 50 other members of the judiciary, journalists, Indigenous leaders and others who have fled the country (2019-2023) after denouncing harassment against them by the Public Ministry.

This pattern of persecution against anti-corruption defenders must end. We strongly urge that authorities:

- reverse the conviction of Virginia Laparra and drop all criminal charges
- reinstate her ability to practice law and to hold public office
- avoid the misuse of the judicial process against anti-corruption defenders by reviewing and adjusting any current criminal cases, as recommended by the IACHR

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai

Co-coordinators

  
Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Lic. José Alejandro Córdova Herrera, Procurador de los Derechos Humanos ~ via email  
Licda. María Consuelo Porras Argueta, Fiscal General de la República ~ via email  
Hugo Beteta, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ email, US mail  
IACHR: Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Guatemala), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
OACNUDH: Mika Kanervavuori, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (UN) ~ via email  
US State Department: Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC ~ vial email  
US State Department: William Popp, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of Angela Melton ~ via email  
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email  
US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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**The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:**