

Protection International (PI)  
**Statement ahead of the Guatemalan general election of 25 June 2023**

23 June 2023

*Protection International (PI) is an international non-profit organisation that supports human rights defenders (HRDs) in developing their security and protection management strategies. Our ethos is centred around HRDs and people's right to defend human rights.*

**Ahead of the general election scheduled to take place on 25 June 2023, PI insists on the importance of protecting HRDs – regardless of whether they are individuals or collectives, activists or professionals such as lawyers, journalists, justice operators, etc. – in their efforts to denounce corruption, impunity and human rights violations, as well as in their call for genuine democracy in Guatemala.** It is imperative that HRDs' rights to the freedoms of association, assembly and expression – including the right to access information, to engage in public debates and discourses, to take part in journalistic activity and to make commentary on matters of public interest and human rights – are respected, honoured and protected.

Since the [dismantling of the United Nations-backed \*International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala\* \(CICIG\)](#) in 2019, **Protection International** has been following with great concern the progressive deterioration of democracy and the rule of law in the country. This includes the criminalisation of independent justice operators and the de-capitalisation, de-funding or closure of mechanisms put in place to advance human rights and transitional justice. In parallel, civil society has denounced a trend to criminalise protest and dissent, the defense of the environment and the fight against corruption, as well as numerous physical and digital attacks and other violations of people's civil and political rights.

Together with other civil society organisations working in Guatemala, we have shared our concerns surrounding the threats and challenges that HRDs face in several public and private statements addressed to different multilateral institutions (such as the Special Procedures and other mechanisms of the [Human Rights Council](#), the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, or the General Prosecutor of the [International Criminal Court](#)), as well as to the general public. We have also followed up and disseminated similar statements of concern released by regional and international human rights institutions and mechanisms such as the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (also [here](#)); up to [eight UN Special Mechanisms](#); the [UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#) or the [European Parliament](#).

Over the past few weeks, Protection International has worked to defend and protect the **right to freedom of expression** in Guatemala: this is of utmost importance for democratic governance, and even more so during election periods, often characterized by their high-stakes nature. However, the situation regarding freedom of expression and media in Guatemala is dire. PI has denounced this worrying situation [together](#)

[with civil society allies](#) and as a part of an [international mission of verification](#) on freedom of expression and press, whose [report](#) was launched yesterday.

*“The mission found that the silencing of the press in Guatemala is becoming an alarming trend and that impunity has contributed to a climate of censorship and prosecution that includes journalists and media outlets, as noted in 2021 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights when it included the country in Chapter IV.B”. – Anabella Sibrián, PI Country Representative in Guatemala*

*“In the pursuit of genuine democracy and respect of fundamental human rights, Protection International calls on the Guatemalan government to ensure that the people can freely exercise their rights to vote and freedom of expression, and are protected from any form of violence or harm. We call on the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to provide clear explanations about the denounced irregularities in the inscription of candidates.” – Mae Ocampo, PI Executive Director*

**With regards to the election on 25 June, PI calls on the Guatemalan government and its agencies to:**

- Uphold and protect genuine democracy and the rights of all in Guatemala at this crucial time; in particular, we urge the government to recognise and promote the key role that HRDs play in ensuring safe, just and fair elections;
- Take swift and preventive action to ensure the protection of HRDs and civil society organisations involved in election monitoring against threats and attacks, including in the digital space. There should be a commitment to a “zero tolerance stance” on violence against HRDs and the people of Guatemala;
- Ensure that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal carries out the due investigation and provides a clear explanation regarding the allegations of irregularity in the process of registration of candidates, with reported arbitrary obstructions – as reported by different international or regional institutions such as the [Inter-American Human Rights Commission](#) and the [European Union](#).

It is PI’s hope that the government that will emerge from the June 2023 election will make the restoration of the rule of law and the democratic governance in the country a priority, and that it will provide HRDs and civil society with the support they need and the protection they are entitled to.

For any press queries, please contact PI by writing to [ao@protectioninternational.org](mailto:ao@protectioninternational.org).