

The logo for actalliance eu, featuring the word "actalliance" in red and black, and "eu" in black.The logo for CIDSE, with the text "CIDSE" in large black letters and "together for global justice" below it, accompanied by a colorful graphic of horizontal lines.The logo for pbi, with the letters "pbi" in a stylized font and the tagline "abriendo espacios para la paz" below it.The logo for obs, with the letters "obs" in a bold, lowercase font, and the text "a joint programme" above it, and "OHCHR fidh" and "The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders" below it.

## **European Parliament (EP) mobilises for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Guatemala**

- 233 human rights defenders assaults and 14 homicides were registered in 2016. The majority of those remained unpunished
- The EP reports threats and intimidation campaigns towards court officials
- The EP urges both Guatemalan authorities to comply with their human rights obligations, and the Congress to ratify the proposal for a justice reform

**Brussels 16 of February, 2017.** The European Parliament, during its plenary session in Strasbourg, has approved an urgent resolution on the situation of human rights defenders in Guatemala. By this initiative, euro-deputies express their concerns and acknowledge the work carried out by human rights defenders. For this reason, they urge the Guatemalan government to adopt measures aimed at protecting HRDs from assaults and dangers they are confronting regularly.

Figures are alarming. The EP recalls that between January and November 2016, 223 assaults were registered against Human Rights Defenders as well as 14 killings and 7 attempted murders. Since the beginning of the year, 2 Human Rights Defenders were killed in Guatemala. The majority of these crimes were the final act of a long and repetitive cycle of violence.

The EP also underlines the hostile environment in which justice officials have to work. They face harassment, criminalization, coercion, discredit and intimidation campaigns, which undermine the independence of the judiciary system in the country.

The resolution also supports the new justice reform initiative, which has been recently submitted in the Guatemalan Congress. It aims at undertaking legal reforms to strengthen the Rule of Law in the country.

### **Majority support in the European Parliament**

According to Beatriz Becerra, vice-chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament and member of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), "human rights defenders are the most powerful asset in the achievement of a more independent justice, however, they are defamed, harassed and ultimately assassinated. For these reasons the Guatemalan government has to protect them with ambitious public policies".

Last year, Hans-Olaf Henkel, member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) took part in an European Parliament mission to Guatemala. "Since my visit, I closely followed this

serious situation and although I developed hopes with the new elected president, today I am deeply disillusioned as the situation of lawyers and Human Rights Defenders seems highly worrying”.

Marina Albiol, of the GUE/NGL group considers that “ showing concerns is not enough”, especially because “EU responsibility is evident”. “There is a link between the presence of multinational corporations and attacks to Human Rights Defenders who oppose and mobilise against hydro electrical projects, as shown by the case of Pojom II or Renace, mining projects such as FeNix or the one represented by the French oil company Perenco”.

Finally, Ernest Urtasun, member of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance states that “it is not possible that representatives of the judiciary as well as the Director of the International commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), Iván Velázquez, are subject of attacks without the government putting in place efficient protective measures. By submitting a proposal for the reform of the justice system, elaborated with the contribution of many national sectors and under discussion in the Congress now, we can see a light on the horizon. Although it is imperative that the proposal is fully endorsed”.

### **Civil society reactions**

International organizations and civil society networks, whose membership exceeds 500 organisations, celebrate this parliamentary initiative and share the requests and concerns expressed in it.

These organizations highlight in particular the parliamentary petition which invites the EU to take on a more proactive role in the promotion of the security of Human Rights Defenders, through the adoption of effective measures and protection mechanisms in the framework of their political dialogue, cooperation and trade relations with Guatemala.

The organisations hope that this resolution can send a clear message to the Guatemalan authorities in order to act and protect human rights defenders, especially women, rural populations, trade unionists, persons discriminated because of their sexual orientation and indigenous communities; who all work towards a democratic society, and in defense of their land, the environment, Economic Social and Cultural rights, justice and the fight against impunity.

### **For More Information:**

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