

URGENT ACTION

NGOs AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK

Proposed legislative reform in Guatemala would impose undue restrictions, controls and sanctions on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), threatening the rights to freedom of expression and association in the country. The reforms are due to be voted upon and adopted within the coming weeks. Call on Guatemala's Congress to refrain from debating and passing Bill 5257 to ensure that human rights defenders can continue their activities.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Álvaro Enrique Arzú Escobar
President of Congress

Email: aarzu@congreso.gob.gt

Twitter: @AlvaroArzuE and @CongresoGuate

Dear Mr Arzú,

I am writing to you to express my concern over Bill 5257 which aims to amend Guatemala's "Law on Non-Governmental Organizations for Development".

Bill 5257 poses a serious threat to the rights to freedom of expression and association in Guatemala. If passed, the reform would impose excessive controls and burdensome requirements for the registration and operation of NGOs in the country. It would also grant broad powers to the government to permanently suspend the activities of an NGO for reasons such as "disturbance of public order". The interpretation of this ambiguous expression could lead to the arbitrary closure of civil society organizations and the imposition of criminal sanctions against the human rights defenders that work in them, as an attempt to silence and harass them.

Strong leaders know that placing excessive bureaucratic obstacles on NGOs hurts the society they're meant to protect. I therefore urge you to refrain from debating and passing Bill 5257 into law as a way to lead in the respect of the rights to freedom of expression and association in Guatemala and ensure that human rights defenders can continue to their job.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Human rights defenders in Guatemala carry out their activities in an extremely hostile environment, particularly those working on rights related to land, territory and the environment. They face continuous threats, intimidation and attacks. The Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEQUA) reported 26 human rights defenders were killed in 2018.

Defenders also face stigmatization and smear campaigns by private actors and the Guatemalan authorities, and the criminal justice system is regularly misused to criminalize them, in an attempt to break up movements and organizations, wearing down the defenders and removing them from the public arena. For more information, see the Amnesty International report "[We are defending the land with our blood": Defenders of the land, territory and environment in Honduras and Guatemala](#)" and "[Americas: State Protection Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders](#)".

Amnesty International recently cited Bill 5257 in its briefing "[Laws Designed to Silence: the Global Crackdown on Civil Society Organizations](#)", as an example of a global trend towards using legislation to repress NGOs and human rights defenders.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 9 April 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Human rights defenders in Guatemala** (They: masculine and feminine)