

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 (UDEFEUGUA) 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)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR ACISCLO VALLADARES MOLINA, Embassy of Guatemala, 1st Floor & Suite1, 2nd Floor, 105a Westbourne Grove W2 4UW, 020 7221 1525, info@embaquate.com
Please check with your section before sending appeals after the above date.

Please note that messages should be sent by email or social media only as postmail to Guatemala isn't available in all countries.

If primary email bounces back: falejos@congreso.gob.gt (first vice president of the board, Twitter @FelipeAlejos); CC to fchajon@congreso.gob.gt (second vice president) and direccionlegislativa@congreso.gob.gt

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

SUGGESTED MESSAGES DURING ENTIRE UA PERIOD:

#Guatemala @AlvaroArzuE @CongresoGuate, Bill 5257 could lead to the arbitrary closure of NGOs and criminal sanctions against human rights defenders. Don't pass this law!
#NoALa5257

Bill 5257 is a threat to freedom of expression and freedom of association in #Guatemala.
@AlvaroArzuE @CongresoGuate, don't undermine the work of human rights defenders
#NoALa5257

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTION FOR WORLD NGO DAY (Feb 27-March 7):

We also encourage activists to be part of the ONE WEEK DIGITAL ACTION around World NGO Day (February 27- March 7):

As you know, the BRAVE global team is planning campaign actions on this day surrounding the recent briefing "Laws Designed to Silence: the Global Crackdown on Civil Society Organizations" (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/9647/2019/en/>), where Bill 5257 is mentioned as part of the global trend of using repressive legislation to silence NGOs. We therefore invite you and your networks to join this global call and increase impact with the following messages suggested by the global BRAVE campaign.

ENGLISH

Strong leaders welcome different opinions and applaud those who defend human rights. Bill 5257 in #Guatemala is a threat to these values. @CongresoGuate #NoALa5257
#WorldNGODay

Strong leaders know that placing excessive bureaucratic obstacles on NGOs hurts the society they're meant to protect. @CongresoGuate #NoAla5257 #WorldNGODay

#Guatemala Bill 5257 forms part of a worrying global trend to silence human rights defenders and NGOs. Read more here! <https://bit.ly/2SWEvoe>. @CongresoGuate #NoALa5257
#WorldNGODay

SPANISH

Gobernantes fuertes dan la bienvenida a las diferentes opiniones y aplauden a quienes defienden los derechos humanos. @CongresoGuate. La iniciativa de ley 5257 es una amenaza para estos valores. #NoALa5257 #WorldNGODay

Gobernantes fuertes saben que poner obstáculos burocráticos excesivos a las ONGs termina dañando a la sociedad que se supone que deben proteger @CongresoGuate #NoAla5257
#WorldNGODay

La iniciativa de ley 5257 en #Guatemala forma parte de una preocupante tendencia mundial para silenciar a los defensores de los derechos humanos y a las ONG, según @amnistiaonline. <https://bit.ly/2SWEvoe>. @CongresoGuate #NoALa5257 #WorldNGODay