

# URGENT ACTION

## NEW LAW THREATENS NGOs' WORK

On 11 February the Guatemalan Congress enacted Decree 4-2020 (formerly known as Bill 5257). This initiative imposes undue restrictions, controls and sanctions on Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This poses serious risks for the rights to freedom of expression and association in the country and threatens the work of human rights defenders and NGOs. We call on the President to immediately veto this law.

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

**Sr. Alejandro Giammattei**  
**President of Guatemala**

Email: [informacion@secretariaprivada.gob.gt](mailto:informacion@secretariaprivada.gob.gt)

Twitter: @DrGiammattei

Dear Mr. President,

*I am writing to express my serious concern about the decree 4-2020, recently passed by the Guatemalan Congress.*

*Several provisions in this decree threaten the rights to freedom of expression and association in Guatemala and the right to defend human rights.*

*For example, it grants broad powers to authorities to shut down civil society organisations whose activities are considered to "disrupt public order". The use of such an ambiguous term would unnecessarily lead to further harassment towards people and organisations, who are already facing constant attacks and unfounded criminal charges from the individuals and authorities who disapprove of their important work, standing up for human rights in Guatemala.*

***I urge you to immediately veto the Decree 4-2020, to protect the rights to freedom of expression and association and to ensure that human rights defenders can continue their fundamental work in Guatemala.***

*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 467 attacks against human rights defenders in 2019, including 20 murders and attempted murders. Defenders also face stigmatisation and smear campaigns from private actors and the Guatemalan authorities. The criminal justice system is regularly misused to criminalise human rights defenders, in an attempt to break up movements and organisations by wearing down the defenders and removing them from the public arena.

Amnesty International has fully documented this situation in its reports, [“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”](#).

In February 2019, Amnesty International was alerted of the imminent approval of Bill 5257, which is aimed at reforming the 2003 Law on NGOs. If passed, it would impose excessive controls and onerous 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 NGOs for ambiguous reasons such as, “disturbance of public order”. The potential interpretations of “disturbance of public order” could lead to the arbitrary closure of civil society organisations and worsening criminalisation, through the imposition of criminal sanctions against the human rights defenders that work in them.

Amnesty International also recently cited Bill 5257 in its briefings, [“Last Chance of Justice, Dangerous setbacks for human rights and the fight against impunity in Guatemala”](#) and [“Laws Designed to Silence: The Global Crackdown on Civil Society Organizations”](#), as dangerous examples of the global trend of using legislation to repress NGOs and human rights defenders.

After several failed attempts, on 11 February 2020, the Guatemalan Congress passed the law, which is now registered as Decree 4-2020.

### **PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

### **PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 13 March 2020

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

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Human Rights Defenders and Organizations in Guatemala (They, Them, Theirs)

**ADDITIONAL TARGETS:** Ambassador Acisclo Valladares Molina, Embassy of Guatemala, 105a Westbourne Grove, Bayswater, London W2 4UW

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr34/9933/2019/en/>