

GUATEMALA

STOP EVICTIONS AGAINST MAYAN COMMUNITIES AND RESPECT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS OVER THEIR LANDS, TERRITORIES AND RESOURCES.

The Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI), whose mission is to confront rights violation and criminalization of indigenous peoples with impunity, **urgently calls on the State of Guatemala to stop the evictions and aggression by the security forces against the Maya Poqomchi and Maya Q'eqchi communities** of Sierra de Minas, Municipality of Purulha, Baja Verapaz. The Government of Guatemala must recognize, respect and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples over their ancestral territories.

According to information received directly from these Indigenous Mayan communities, since November 21, the villagers of at least 15 indigenous communities were under a military and National Civil Police siege. This siege aimed to arrest Mayan Indigenous leaders, forcefully evict them from their lands in favor of farmers (specifically the Thomae family) and facilitate the establishment of extractive companies.

The siege directly affected 15 communities, such as the Pancoc, Monjón, Santa Rita, Washington, Dos Fuentes, Kalijá, and Moxante, and indirectly impacted 80 more communities. Inhabitants of Pancoc and Monjón were forced to flee their homes due to the violent incursion of the security forces.

Although the siege by more than 2,000 police and military personnel was withdrawn, **the threats of eviction continue and a group of armed civilians at the service of the landowners continues to terrorize the communities.** The military detachment, installed since 2012 on the lands occupied by the landowners, also continues to exist.

According to testimonies of villagers, **the police and military burned property and livestock belonging to the indigenous Mayans. They restricted their free movement, including the entry of goods, terrorized the communities, and prevented people from selling their agricultural products and obtaining food and health services.**

These gross violations of the individual and collective rights of the Mayan Indigenous Peoples continue unabated in spite of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (**IACHR**) **Resolution 67/2020 dated October 14, 2020, which issued precautionary measures in favor of indigenous Maya Poqomchi' families** from the Washington and Dos Fuentes communities. The resolution warned of the urgent situation in which their rights to life and personal safety are at risk.

These actions include the outright disregard to the collective right of the Maya Indigenous Peoples over their customary lands, territories and resources and their right to legitimately reclaim and recover their customary lands. These lands were taken from

them in favor of German farmers since the 1800s--ignoring the titles that have recognized the communal ownership by Mayan communities since the times of the Spanish Crown and independence, and instead claiming this communal property as private property. Actions undertaken by the Indigenous Mayans to protect and defend their territories have included both judicial litigation and the affirmation of their right to autonomy, and the rejection of the extractive projects, such as hydroelectric dams.

The legitimate demands of these Indigenous communities have been met by unjust actions by the the authorities and the finqueros with series of eviction attempts in 2009, 2015, 2021, and 2022. The particular communities targeted are from Washington, Dos Fuentes and Panza. These communities were subjected to disappearances, criminalization, assassination of community leaders and the installation of military detachments. The situation has worsened with the arrival of organized crime, which has taken over the paramilitary structures responsible for massacres during the counterinsurgency period.

The communities have denounced that the militarization of their territories was not intended to provide them with security, but rather to guarantee the implementation of extractivist projects and the dispossession of their lands by farmers.

In this context and **considering the international human rights obligations of the Guatemalan State in light of its adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention 169, and the Guatemalan constitutional framework itself, the Indigenous Peoples Rights International:**

- **Supports the urgent demand for the demilitarization** of Sierra de Mina expressed by the affected indigenous Mayan communities.
- **Demands that the State of Guatemala immediately stop the eviction orders,** as well as the violence and criminalization of the aforementioned communities.
- **Urges the responsible authorities to comply with the precautionary measures** issued by the IACHR in 2020.
- **Demands the dismantling of the armed civilian groups** at the service of the landowners that threaten the Indigenous communities.
- **Calls for the legal recognition, restitution and protection of the customary lands of the Maya Indigenous Peoples by the State of Guatemala, and to establish an effective accountability mechanism for violators of human rights.**

We urge the international human rights organizations to raise attention on this urgent situation and join us in demanding urgent action by the State of Guatemala to protect the individual and collective rights of the Maya Indigenous Peoples.



We also urge the international community to express their solidarity to the Maya Indigenous Peoples and urge the State of Guatemala to respect, recognize and protect their individual and collective rights and stop human rights violations with impunity.