



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

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COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE – COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

Guatemala: End the forced evictions of *campesinos*

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The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) expressed its concern today at the violent forced eviction of some 300 members of the *campesino* community Nueva Esperanza, carried out on August 23 in the Department of Petén, Guatemala. The evictees, including children and elderly persons, were forced to take refuge in the mountains or forest and have been left without shelter and means of subsistence.

The Guatemalan Minister of the Interior, Carlos Menocal, has justified the eviction by alleging that the evictees had been involved in drug trafficking, despite the fact that no evidence or criminal charges have been brought against any of the 300 persons. The ICJ fears that a primary reason for the eviction is to enable the implementation of a massive *Cuatro Balam* development project, consisting in the construction of four hydroelectric dams on the banks of the river Usumacinta and works for the tourism industry.

“These forced evictions carried out by the Guatemalan authorities constitute a serious violation of human rights against a vulnerable population, in breach of Guatemalan’s international obligations”, said Sandra Ratjen, ICJ Senior Legal Adviser. “The evictions were carried out without respecting the most minimal procedural requirements, including notification and consultation, provision of alternative housing, compensation and resettlement, and access to legal remedies.”

The ICJ is also concerned at the persistent moves aimed criminalization of social protests in relation to land conflicts, and extensive use of laws of exception in several districts of the country, allowing for the derogation of human rights protections.

The ICJ urges Guatemalan authorities, and in particular the Attorney General, the Supreme Court of Justice and the Minister of Interior in Guatemala to:

- respect fully its human rights and rule of law obligations, including the right to adequate housing and the prohibition of forced evictions;
- investigate the alleged violations of rights in connection with the eviction of the Nueva Esperanza community;
- provide access to effective remedies and reparation to the victims;
- end the widespread practice of forced evictions and ensure that any justifiable evictions are in compliance with the provisions of the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement;
- cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in relation to the policy and practice of forced evictions in the country, including the evictions of the Nueva Esperanza community.

The ICJ strongly encourages the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations (OHCHR) in Guatemala to conduct an effective investigation into the eviction through a field visit, pursuant to its observer mandate established by agreement with Guatemala.

For further information, contact Sandra Ratjen, Senior Legal Adviser, +41 22 97 3835.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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