

Licenciado Oscar Berger Perdomo  
President of the Republic of Guatemala  
Casa Presidencial, 6 a. Avenida, 4-18 zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Dear President Berger:

I am writing to express my deep concern about attacks directed against Guatemalan women. The past five years have shown a disturbing increase in the number of women and girls who have been brutally murdered in Guatemala. Not all these crimes have the same motives, but there is a clear trend of exceptional cruelty and sexual violence. Gender has been a significant factor in the crimes, as well as in the lack of due attention given to these crimes by the Guatemalan police and Attorney General.

The Guatemalan government shows little commitment to investigate and prosecute these horrendous killings. According to the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, less than 10% of the more than 1,000 known murders of women were investigated at any level. In the few investigations that have been conducted, the work has been far from adequate as evidence is not properly collected or preserved, there is a lack of communication between state institutions, and investigations are stalled by unnecessary delays. Poor investigative practices do not encourage serious prosecution of these cases, and to date only three people have been sentenced for these types of crimes. The lack of attention from the government is a clear act of both economic and gender discrimination, as the majority of the female victims come from the urban poor.

The state's failure to combat the murders of Guatemalan women is a violation of one of the most fundamental human rights, the right to life. I demand that you show a public commitment to protecting women through a highly visible campaign to show that violence against women is wrong and will be punished by the authorities. The Guatemalan people, and the rest of the world, must know that these violations will no longer be tolerated.

To accompany the campaign, the National Civil Police should direct adequate resources to investigate crimes against women. Cooperation should be required amongst the various departments, and more resources, including proper training and technical assistance, should be dedicated to addressing gender-based violence. Official crime reports and statistics should include the dimension of gender-based violence, such that these data can be used to implement effective policies toward ending violence against women. The Attorney General's Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Women should be granted sufficient resources to improve its role in investigations, to ensure the full collaboration by all other government departments, and extend its services across the country. With timely, impartial and professional investigations, solid cases could be built. The state must then use these investigations to ensure accountability, and bring the perpetrators to justice regardless of their position in society.

Putting an end to official inaction is the only way to show a commitment to the human rights of women and all Guatemalan people. Only through undertaking immediate, coordinated, and effective investigations into the killings of women and girls, and through bringing those responsible to justice, can the issue begin to be addressed. I look forward to hearing from you about these important concerns.

Sincerely,

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