

## COMMUNIQUÉ

### **BRAVE AND THOROUGH ACTION BY THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE AND JUSTICE SYSTEM**

ImpunityWatch congratulates the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Guatemalan justice system for bravely and consistently combating impunity for crimes of the past and present. In recent years, the Public Prosecutor's Office has displayed considerable independence, capacity, and courage in investigating and prosecuting severe human rights violations committed against the civilian population during the internal armed conflict, and in applying national and international standards that penalize internationally significant crimes such as torture, forced disappearance, and genocide.

On January 6, 2016, 13 former military officers were arrested, accused of crimes against humanity and the forcible disappearance of 533 people buried in a clandestine cemetery located on the grounds of former Military Base 21 in Cobán. The military officers must be held accountable to justice for the skeletons of people who disappeared between 1981 and 1983 and were found at the military base with signs of torture, the majority of whom were children, women, and elderly people. Among those facing charges are General Benedicto Lucas García, the brother of former president Lucas García (1978-1982) who served as Chief of the Presidential General Staff during that time period, along with other prominent military officials at the same military base.

Currently, the Regional Training Command for Peacekeeping Operations (CREOMPAZ) operates at that site, providing military training for United Nations peacekeeping missions; this represents profound disrespect for the victims buried there. Victims' family members have requested that the United Nations withdraw from that military base and that the Guatemalan State grant the facilities to the population for building a ceremonial and educational center to honor the victims. In this sense, it is appropriate for the United Nations and the Guatemalan government to consider canceling military operations at the site.

The State of Guatemala is taking significant steps in the struggle against impunity and in strengthening the rule of law, and it is essential that these efforts be backed by the citizenry and the international community. Like all citizens, the victims of the internal armed conflict, the majority of whom are women and their children, have the legitimate right to demand justice and to find their loved ones whom they have been seeking for over thirty years.