

VISIT OF GUATEMALAN JUDGES TO THE NETHERLANDS 18-21 September 2016

From September 18th to October 4th a delegation of four prestigious judges from Guatemala will be visiting the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden to meet with politicians, judges associations and civil society organizations in order to discuss the current situation of the justice in Guatemala. This visit occurs in the context of key changes in the State reform, after the corruption scandal in Guatemala on 2015. The main goal of this visit is to present the current situation of the judicial independence and the obstacles and challenges on the fight against impunity.

The delegation is composed out of Yassmin Barrios, who convicted former dictator Rios Montt for genocide in 2013; Miguel Angel Galvez, who indicted former President Otto Perez Molina and Vice-president Roxana Baldetti for corruption; Haroldo Vasquez, President of the Association *Jueces por la Integridad*; and Claudia Gonzalez, member of the Judiciary Career Council.

As members of *Jueces por la Integridad* they make efforts to fight against corruption and work together to promote the justice reform in Guatemala. This association emerged after the 2014 election of the Supreme Court and Appeals Courts that was publicly denounced by CICIG and civil society organizations for being a politicized process. Members of *Jueces por la Integridad* are characterized by their honesty and courage, and they are socially respected for their capacity, independence and compromise in the fight against impunity.

Members of the Delegation

Yassmin Barrios



As the president of one of two of Guatemala's High Risk Court Tribunals, Yassmin Barrios has made a career of taking on the most difficult and politically-sensitive cases. Such cases have confronted high-profile corruption, organized crime and drug trafficking, and human rights abuses occurring during Guatemala's 36-year internal armed conflict (1960-1996). Most strikingly, in 2013, Barrios served as the presiding judge in the genocide trial of former Guatemalan dictator Efraim Rios Montt. The trial represented the first time a former head of state was tried for genocide in his home country by the national judiciary. By initiating the judicial process against the former dictator, Barrios gave a voice to thousands of Ixil-Mayan victims, provided an important legal precedent for genocide cases worldwide, and demonstrated the importance of an independent judiciary.

Barrios is a Guatemalan lawyer, she graduated from the National University of Guatemala, San Carlos University, (USAC), got her Master in criminal law and Constitutional law from San Carlos University, and her PhD from Mariano Galvez University.

She is a judge since 1996 to the present day. In 2001, she was part of the criminal court that convicted Byron Lima Oliva, Byron Lima Estrada to 20 years of prison for Juan Gerardi's murder, the first important case against a military officer in Guatemala. Since that date, Barrios has suffered threats and harassment, including an attempt of assassination in 2001.

In 2011, she convicted four members of the Kaibil Forces for the Dos Erres massacre, where 201 persons, including children and women were killed by the Guatemalan army, during Rios Montt's Government. In February 2016, Barrios presided the criminal tribunal that convicted two military officers for sexual slavery and crimes against humanity in the Sepur Zarco Case. This is the first conviction for systematic rape by members of the army that is tried in Guatemala.

Barrios has received several national and international awards, such as the International Women of Courage award by the U.S. Department of State in 2014; the Human Rights Award by Consejo General de la Abogacía Española in 2013; the Programa Cívico Permanente for her outstanding career as judge by the Banco Industrial of Guatemala in 2015.

Miguel Angel Galvez



Miguel Angel Galvez works at the High Risk B Tribunal in Guatemala City. Gálvez graduated from San Carlos University (USAC) and hold two master degrees in Criminal Law and Criminal Process.

He was a Judge of high impact courts in Quiché, Baja Verapaz and Chiquimula. Since 2011, he has been a High Risk Court judge in Guatemala City, recommended by CICIG for his integrity and capacity. He has ruled over high profile cases as the murder of PARLACEN congressmen, Rosenberg case, and drug trafficking cases of Lima. In 2013 Gálvez decided to open the genocide case against Rios Montt.

He is worldly known for cases of corruption such as La Linea, TCQ and Cooptación del Estado, and for the detention and prosecution of former vice president Roxana Baldetti and President Otto Perez Molina, and a dozen of high rank public officers of the Partido Patriota Government, and private contractors involved in corruption, many of them untouchables because of their political power and position.

Last April, Galvez made a public denouncement that the minister of the interior had discovered a plot to kill him, at the time he was deciding on the TCQ case and the indictment of the former president and vice president.

He is one of the most popular judges in Guatemala and is very respected by all sectors of society. He is one of the founders of *Jueces por la Integridad* and Vice President of this association.

Haroldo Vasquez Sanchez



Haroldo Vasquez Sanchez is a lawyer and holds a master's degree in Criminal Law from the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. As a lawyer he worked in the Ombudsman Office and was part of the special staff that investigated the detention and killing of Efraim Bamaca in 1996. He is a judge since 2001. He is working as president of the Amatitlan Criminal Tribunal.

He was the president of the Judges and Magistrates Association (*Asociacion de Jueces y Magistrados AJMOJ*) between 2011-2012. He was not re-elected in 2013 due to an internal fraction of judges who were supported by military officers.

In 2015, he promoted the foundation of *Jueces por la Integridad*, a new association that proclaims the integrity and the fight against corruption in the judicial system. Some of the most important judges joined the association, including Miguel Angel Galvez and other judges that opposed the vicious election of court magistrates in 2014. He is currently the President of *Jueces por la Integridad*.

Claudia Elvira Gonzalez

She graduated from the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, and she is a judge of criminal courts since 2003. As a judge of Mixco's Tribunal of criminal matters, she has pronounced a great number of convictions against members of criminal gangs, including high rank members of gangs, such as "mara 18" and "mara salvatrucha". In 2011, the Mixco tribunal was attacked by members of gangs and one officer of the court was killed. At present, Claudia Gonzalez is a member of *Jueces por la Integridad*. This association promoted her as a member of the Judiciary Career Council as a representative of judges of first degree. She was elected by a large majority and is currently a member of the Judiciary Career Council (period 2016-2017).

The Judiciary Career Council is a very important office, since it plays a decisive role in the election and appointment of new judges and, designing and monitoring the performance of the judges and magistrates. The performance evaluation is a prerequisite in Guatemala to continue in office, because every five years the term of the judges has to be revalidated by the Supreme Court of Justice. Claudia Gonzalez is currently a member of the board of directors of *Jueces por la Integridad*.

*For more information on the visit of the judges to the Netherlands please get in touch with
Impunity Watch +31 30 3072280*