

Guatemala Election Watch #28

Democracy in Guatemala?
**Commentary by Brisna Caxaj-Rowe, a survivor of Guatemalan
repression**

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/democracy-in-guatemala>

Three months, 23 days until January 14, 2024 transfer of power

Will the US & Canada accept Guatemala's return to democracy?

By Brisna Caxaj-Rowe

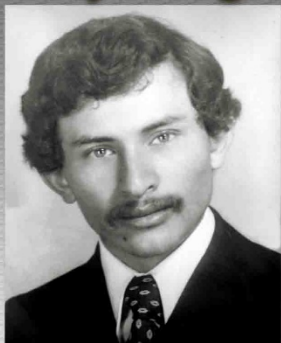
Brisna's commentary was read during a September 12, 2023 presentation in
Toronto, Canada

Good evening, everyone, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you my thoughts about the result of recent elections and challenges in Guatemala.

In the context of the "Cold War", with the excuse of fighting communism, the United States, Canada, and other countries supported Guatemalan military dictatorships from 1954 onwards.

My brother-in-law, Marco ('Maco') Antonio Caxaj Rodríguez, was forcibly disappeared in December 1982. My first husband, Carlos Leonel Caxaj Rodríguez, was extrajudicially executed in July 1985.

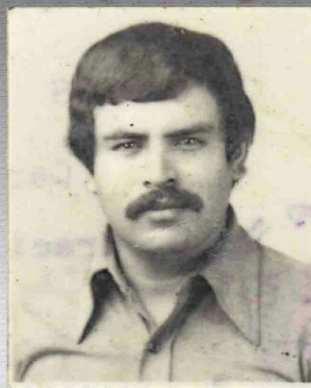
**Marco Antonio
Caxaj Rodríguez**



*Víctima de desaparición forzada
el 29 de diciembre de 1982*

**"Construiremos una
nueva sociedad
en donde todos
tengan oportunidad"**

**Carlos Leonel
Caxaj Rodríguez**



Asesinado 29 de julio 1985

**"Los heroes y los mártires
no se lloran, se imitan
en el combate"**

The problems in Guatemala, however, started long before the U.S.-backed military coup in 1954, that ousted our only truly democratic governments of Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán who were in power from 1944-1954.

These problems began with the onset of European Imperialism, including the Spanish conquest of much of what is now known as "Latin America".

During this entire time, most Guatemalans have lived under European and US imperialism and colonialism which has served the interests of a powerful elite and their international partners.

When we lived in Guatemala, Carlos and I thought about the future of our family and all its people. We dreamed about a world in which everyone could live in a real democracy, with justice, dignity, and respect, as occurred from 1944 to 1954, a period we call *La Primavera* - The Spring.

Carlos' political participation focused on the students' and teachers' union movements, and the Mutual Support Group (GAM) that was founded in the early 1980s by family members of the ever-increasing number of people – ordinary citizens – who were being forcibly disappeared and extrajudicially executed by government forces.

Along with two of Carlos and Marco Antonio's surviving brothers, I came with my three children to Canada as a political refugee in 1985. Ever since then, we have participated in different groups that support popular struggles related to Guatemala, Canada and elsewhere.

In Guatemala, the objective of the repressive forces was always to eliminate courageous people like Marco Antonio and Carlos Leonel who were challenging the system of exploitation and exclusion.

They failed, because thousands of victims and their relatives survived, and some went into exile and have been actively involved in solidarity with Guatemala since then.

After 69 years, a light at the end of the tunnel

After 69 years of military-backed, corrupt, exploitative, and criminal governments, we now see a light at the end of the tunnel. Bernardo Arevalo (son of President Juan José Arevalo, 1945-1950) and Karin Herrera, both from the Semilla Party, were elected president and vice-president on August 20, with over 60% of the vote.

After decades living in exile, when the August 20th election date was approaching, we began preparing for voting – voting with memory.

Memory in this context means remembering who the corrupt ones are (*el pacto de corruptos* / covenant of the corrupt), who are the intellectual authors and executors of crimes against humanity during the decades of U.S.-backed State repression and genocides.

Memory means understanding the connections between the criminals of the past and present, and their international partners and supporters.

With the election of the Semilla Party, people like me see a little opening that could begin a process of ending systemic exploitation and repression, corruption and impunity, and building an actually democratic country, one governed by the rule of law and justice.

However, we must be realistic about how complicated this situation is and understand the actions that the corrupt ones and criminal elites are taking to prevent Arevalo and Herrera from even taking office on the January 14, 2024.

Covenant of the corrupt (*pacto de corruptos*) take-over (*cooptacion*) of institutions of government and State

For instance, the Public Ministry in Guatemala, led by current Attorney General Consuelo Porras, has been criminalizing (filing fraudulent criminal charges against) judges, prosecutors and lawyers, journalists and political opponents, social leaders and human rights defenders, abusively using State institutions and biased, spurious criminal prosecutions.

At the same time, this Public Ministry and some co-opted judges have released from jail people who were found guilty of being members of organized crime rings and committing war crimes, especially those people investigated by the forcibly dissolved International Commission against Impunity (CICIG).

Guatemala's corrupt elites, in control of the legal and political systems, have most recently filed a spurious complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office against President-elect Arevalo for the so-called falsification of signatures of members of the Semilla Party. They are trying to criminalize and ultimately suspend the Semilla Party, to prevent Arevalo and Herrera from taking office, and to overturn the result of the Guatemalan elections.

These elites have also initiated legal proceedings seeking to withdraw the immunity from legal liability of magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in retaliation for their carrying out of the elections and respecting the will of the people of Guatemala during the elections.

Meanwhile, the FECI Prosecutor – Rafael Curruchiche - is trying to enforce an illegal resolution of Judge Fredy Orellana to suspend the Semilla party based on earlier spurious charges.

Coup d'état

These aggressive attacks against the Semilla Party and the electoral process –and there are more- show the corrupt elite's intention to consummate a technical coup d'état against Arevalo and Herrera.

In this context one has to question the real possibility for the elected president and vice-president to open a new historical period in Guatemala.

The decision of the people of Guatemala to have elected a new President, Vice-President and government gives them legitimacy, legality and representativity, and hopefully the strength necessary to oppose and defeat any legal maneuver to undermine or block them.

The dominant traditional elites in Guatemala will have a bleak prospect of governability if they consent to the carrying out of this technical coup d'état. Consummating such a coup opens a scenario of both national and regional instability inconvenient even for the most conservative actors in Guatemalan society.

Best case scenario!

However, if the elected government succeeds in overcoming obstacles and takes office on January 14, 2024, it will do so under extremely complex and difficult conditions.

At present, the Semilla Party has only 23 out of 160 deputies in the Congress of the Republic. Moreover, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Constitutional Court, and many judicial operators (judges, prosecutors, lawyers) are co-opted by the criminal elites.

Similarly, important State institutions such as the Public Ministry (Attorney General's office), the Comptroller General of Accounts, the police and military respond to the interests of the traditional predatory elites.

President-elect Arevalo has spoken insistently of the importance of the jobs performed by the executive branch in the administration of public affairs, which could prevent the powerful elites from "buying influences" at different levels of the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

This will hopefully put an end to the paying for any more "convenient business-political alliances" that have been taking place for generations, and will slowly allow the current correlation of forces in favor of corruption and impunity to be broken.

Arevalo's political position is clear - his government will begin to lay the foundations to end the current regime of systemic corruption. People who support the new government expect it to slowly but surely begin to dismantle the institutional mechanisms that have allowed the illicit enrichment of numerous officials and their national and international partners.

This vision and determination of the new government are important to help mobilize Guatemalans within the country and outside it.

Immediate demand: Resignation of Attorney General

A crucial, immediate battle that the new government must fight is with the Attorney General, if she does not resign before the end of her term in 2026, given consistent and growing public pressure demanding it. The incompatibility of the new government with her and some of her accomplices is tangible.

Despite this difficult panorama, the election of Arevalo and Herrera means to me and many exiled activists the possibility of building a Guatemala free of corruption, a Guatemala characterized by democracy and justice.

This new democratic era should be strengthened by mechanisms allowing responsible and effective participation of citizens in public policy decision-making. How the new government will be able to stimulate and strengthen the participation of organized civil society as a vibrant actor is important to help Guatemalan society establish new, transparent, and dynamic political systems and procedures.

Guatemalans within and outside our country must work united with the support of the international community. We are ready to continue this battle for a new Guatemala and would like to honor the words of our relatives Maco and Carlos. A song written by Victor Caxaj, and sung by his brother Marco Antonio, says: "We will build a new society where everyone has a chance...". Carlos's phrase says: "Do not cry for heroes and martyrs, imitate them..."

Are you ready too?

Victims and relatives want justice and to live in peace
¡FLORECERAS GUATEMALA / GUATEMALA WILL BLOOM!

To contact Brisna Caxaj-Rowe: plataformacanada@gmail.com

Please share and re-post this information

'Death by a thousand cuts'

It is impossible to keep up with the attacks being carried out on the electoral process and against the Semilla Party – a 'death by a 100 cuts' strategy of the Covenant of the Corrupt regime in power - long-time "democratic allie" of US, Canada and "international community", to prevent President-elect Arevalo and VP-elected Karin Herrera from taking power on January 14, 2023, or to weaken them such that their executive branch powers will be completely curtailed by the time they assume the Presidency.

US and Canadian governments must support calls for coup plotters to resign

"The coup plotters must resign", President-elect Arevalo recently said, naming officials at center of [efforts targeting](#) his Semilla Party: Attorney General Consuelo Porras, special prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche, Judge Fredy Orellana. The US and Canadian governments, our companies and investors, have a significant measure of responsibility for what is occurring in Guatemala,

given the past 69 years of full economic, political and military relations with corrupt, repressive regimes.

Rights Action calls for Americans and Canadians to share this information widely (including media outlets), and to contact your Senators, Members of Congress and Parliamentarian and urge them to publicly **support calls by President-elect Bernardo Arevalo for coup plotters to resign**: Attorney General Consuelo Porras, special prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche, Judge Fredy Orellana.

- U.S. Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact>
- U.S. House: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Canadian Parliament: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

More information

- Rights Action's "Guatemala Election Watch" alerts (www.rightsaction.org/emails)
- Twitter feeds of Festivals Solidarios (@festivalesgt) & Prensa Comunitaria (@PrensaComunitaria)
- Prensa Comunitaria's daily news (<https://prensacomunitaria.org/>)

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)

To support land and environmental defenders, and democracy, human rights and justice struggles in Honduras and Guatemala, make check to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- US: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: Box 82858, RPO Cabbagetown, Toronto, ON, M5A 3Y2

Credit-card donations: <https://rightsaction.org/donate/>

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