

## **Guatemala: 51 signatories call for authorities to drop criminal charges against Indigenous journalist Anastasia Mejía**

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The undersigned individuals and organizations call on Guatemalan authorities to immediately drop all criminal charges against Indigenous Guatemalan radio journalist Anastasia Mejía Tiriquiz, who faces a criminal trial after being held in arbitrary pre-trial detention for more than a month.

Guatemalan Civil Police arrested Mejía on September 22 for allegedly participating in an August 24 demonstration by a group of residents in the municipality of Joyabaj, Quiché, in central Guatemala. Mejía, a member of the Maya K'iche' community and director of the radio station Xol Abaj Radio and Xol Abaj TV, had reported live on the events on Xol Abaj TV's Facebook page.

She faces charges of sedition and aggravated attack and was held at a detention center in Quetzaltenango for five weeks after her arrest, exposing her to the additional risk of contracting COVID-19 in the detention facility. Although Guatemalan law establishes that an initial hearing must take place within 24 hours after an individual is arrested, her hearing was set for October 8, more than two weeks after her arrest. A judge then pushed back the already-overdue hearing to October 28, to allow for "further investigation of evidence," and leaving Mejía to spend more than a month in arbitrary pre-trial detention before even a preliminary hearing, putting her health at grave risk amid a global pandemic. On October 28, a judge released Mejía to house arrest after she paid a \$2,500 bond, but ruled the criminal proceedings against her could move forward.

Community media outlets like Xol Abaj play a critical role in ensuring Guatemala's Indigenous communities can access information, a right guaranteed in the Guatemalan Constitution and protected under Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights. The outlet is also an example of inclusivity in journalism: Xol Abaj radio broadcasts in both Spanish and K'iche', and most of its reporters are women.

While Article 35 of the Guatemalan Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, in practice many Guatemalan journalists contend with systematic censorship and harassment. Guatemala's rural and Indigenous journalists in particular face greater risk of discrimination and threats from criminal groups and local officials, especially when reporting on topics like land rights, environmental issues or corruption. Community radio stations also face significant barriers in obtaining licenses, leaving many with no choice but to operate unofficially, which exposes their journalists to potential criminal investigations or detention during raids.

Mejía faces serious criminal charges simply for doing her job and keeping her community informed. The disproportionate charges and erratic judicial process seem aimed less at justice

than toward intimidating community journalists like Mejía, discouraging them from important reporting on under-documented communities and leading to even greater self-censorship.

The arrest, excessive detention and criminal prosecution of Anastasia Mejía is a clear attack on freedom of expression and the public's right to access information. Journalists are not criminals, and a free press is not dangerous. We call on Guatemalan authorities to drop the outrageous charges against Mejía immediately.

## **Signatories**

Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, United Kingdom  
Andrea Carrillo Samayoa, La Cuerda, Guatemala  
ARTICLE 19 Oficina para México y Centroamérica  
Asociación Cambiando Vidas, Guatemala  
Asociación Centro Civitas, Guatemala  
Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala (APG), Guatemala  
Dr. Catherine Nolin, Guatemala Research Group, University of Northern BC, Canada  
Ceren İskit, CFWIJ, Turkey  
The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ)  
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)  
Damla Tarhan, CFWIJ, Turkey  
Daniela García Flores, Guatemala  
Derechos Digitales, América Latina  
Edgar A. Loarca M., Guatemala  
Espacio Público, Venezuela  
Free Press Unlimited, The Netherlands  
Fundación Datos Protegidos, Chile  
Fundación Huaira, Ecuador  
Fundamedios, International  
Gabriel Wer, Guatemala  
Instituto Cubano por la Libertad de Expresión y Prensa (ICLEP), Cuba  
Instituto DEMOS, Guatemala  
Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS), Peru  
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) - Latin America, Argentina  
International Press Institute, Austria  
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), United States  
International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), United States  
James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, United States  
Javier Estrada, Periodista independiente, Guatemala  
Jenny Rönngren, Feministiskt Perspektiv, Sweden

Julie López, Freelance journalist, Guatemala  
Katarzyna Mierzejewska, Engagement Coordinator, CFWIJ, Switzerland  
Luis Soto, Guatemala  
Mardoqueo Eliezer Vásquez Us, Guatemala  
Marta Gomez, United States  
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Osmar Eduardo Sarazua Saravia, Guatemala  
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PEN International  
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Pia Flores, Guatemala  
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)  
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Thelma Aldana, Lawyer and Notary Public, United States  
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