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Regional and international civil society organizations criticized baseless anti-CICIG statement made by OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro

Regional and international organizations are dismayed by the apparent attack this week by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, on Guatemala's International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which was established with United Nations support in 2007.

In a tweet issued on Monday, April 8, Almagro expressed the need to ensure that Guatemala's forthcoming presidential elections are conducted properly, and that the country's electoral commission (TSE) be allowed to work "without the influence of external factors, including CICIG." His comments were made in the context of a campaign by political actors opposed to CICIG to question the impartiality of the TSE.

The signatory organizations, all of which work on human rights and the rule of law in Guatemala, likewise support a transparent electoral process that abides by the rule of law. However, they deplore Almagro's statement as an entirely unwarranted and misguided representation of CICIG's important achievements in Guatemala.

CICIG has played a crucial role in strengthening state investigative and prosecutorial institutions, supporting legal reforms, and bolstering democratic checks and balances. CICIG, in partnership with Guatemala's Attorney General's Office, has helped prosecute powerful criminal networks, such as La Línea, a massive fraud conspiracy involving customs revenues that included former President Otto Pérez Molina and other top government officials and business leaders. CICIG has repeatedly demonstrated its courage, objectivity, and independence in combating deep-rooted corruption, including electoral corruption.

In January 2019, Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales unilaterally suspended his government's cooperation with CICIG and expelled the international investigators and other staff who have worked alongside Guatemalan prosecutors on corruption-related investigations from the country. His actions have attracted international censure and have been viewed as a setback to the ongoing fight against impunity and corruption in Guatemala.

Notably, Almagro's tweet followed his meeting in Washington D.C. with the presidential candidate of the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) party, Sandra Torres, and her running mate, Carlos Raúl Morales. The signatory organizations also consider Almagro's remarks to be particularly regrettable given the role the OAS will play in deploying poll monitors to Guatemala for the election on June 16 of this year. In order for the Guatemalan and international communities to have confidence in this electoral observation, is imperative that the OAS act and be seen as impartial.

Accordingly, we call upon Secretary General Almagro to retract his statement unjustifiably denigrating CICIG, to support CICIG's ongoing work, and to ensure the OAS is impartial in monitoring the Guatemalan electoral process.

The organizations joining this statement are: Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), Guatemala Human Rights Commission, Impunity Watch, Lawyers without Borders Canada, Open Society Justice Initiative, OXFAM, Plataforma Internacional contra la Impunidad, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).