

Miguel Ángel Gálvez: "The military wants to impose terror in Guatemala"

The Guatemalan judge, who put soldiers in the dock who committed human rights violations, denounces persecution and threats due to his work.

By **Carlos Salinas Maldonado** in **El País**

The witch hunt against judges and prosecutors fighting against corruption and impunity intensifies in Guatemala. Guatemalan judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez denounces an intensification of the harassment and threats against him for having placed soldiers, who violated human rights during the internal military conflict in the 1980s, in the dock. He is the umpteenth judge in the Central American country to warn of a persecution for doing their job, in a nation where the government of President Alejandro Giammattei has unleashed a brutal crackdown against independent lawyers and prosecutors. Gálvez asserts that he is afraid and weighs his options with his lawyers, including the possibility of leaving his country, as 28 judges and prosecutors have done so far, to have found refuge in Washington, Mexico or Sweden. "This is a political trial against me," says the judge. "Anyone who speaks out against the government becomes its enemy," he says.

It is the same Guatemalan justice to which Gálvez belongs that has decided to prosecute him for his work, alleging procedural errors by the judge. This is a figure that has generated a lot of sympathy in Guatemala, but has also aroused a lot of hatred, due to his stubbornness in putting military personnel, who are part of the case known as *Diario Militar*, in the dock: at least 18 former members of the Army accused of following dissident students and professionals, leftist militants, trade unionists whom they considered 'a danger' and whose names were part of a list in which, in addition, intelligence information was included. The events occurred in the early 1980s and according to Gálvez's investigations, these soldiers kidnapped, tortured and murdered the members of that list, and in many cases even their relatives. "The military leadership of the Army and the security agencies are related," says the judge.

Gálvez will attend on Friday a preliminary hearing before the pre-trial that has been opened against him for doing his job. A preliminary hearing is a legal procedure that in Guatemala is used to determine if high-ranking state officials, judges, and magistrates accused of committing offenses, related to their positions, can be criminally prosecuted. It is the same procedure that the Guatemalan justice system imposed on judges and prosecutors who have handled important cases related to corruption, drug trafficking and impunity. These are public figures, such as the former head of the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity in Guatemala (FECI), Juan Francisco Sandoval, now exiled in the United States, or Judge Erika Aifán, who was in the eye of the hurricane for having handled some of the notorious corruption cases, making her the target of those who do not want to see independent justice in the Central American country.

Gálvez reaffirms that this is 'a political trial' against him and directly blames the persecution directly on President Alejandro Giammattei and his main operator in the justice system, the Attorney General Consuelo Porras, a controversial character, who had already been singled out by other judges and prosecutors for hindering their work. 'She is behind this witch hunt,' says Gálvez. 'In all the actions that I have raised against this persecution, the Public Ministry has made sure that they are declared inadmissible and that the pre-trial proceedings continue. The Attorney General has great influence in this process', explains the judge, who asserts that Porras has been chosen 'in a rather unclear procedure', thanks to the approval of the president, who decided in May to keep her in office. 'It has become clear that the attorney general has been making progress in her plan to guarantee impunity to the criminal networks that she should be prosecuting. From the beginning of her mandate, she complicated the function of committed and independent prosecutors', Carlos Antonio Videz, a former special prosecutor against impunity, who also left Guatemala, had reported in February.

'I'm worried', concedes Gálvez. 'regrettably, there is nothing legal in this process', says the lawyer, who accuses the investigating judge in his case, Roaldo Isaías Chávez, of having close ties to the

Foundation Against Terrorism (FCT), an obscure, far-right organisation made up of ex-military personnel and financed by big capital, which has been very belligerent in the trials against anti-corruption judges and prosecutors. In Guatemala, it is astonishing that this private organization participates in the trials. 'The military wants to impose a state of terror in Guatemala', says Gálvez. 'They want to put a cloak of impunity on the crimes committed by high-ranking officers and subdue the people who work honestly. The military ingredient is important, because they [the Army] have the military intelligence to follow the people they consider their enemies,' denounces the judge.

It is that power of the military that also generates fear for Judge Gálvez. In a telephone interview from Guatemala, the lawyer affirms that they constantly follow him, take photos of him, insult him on social networks and he states that 'I do not rule out the possibility of an attack against me'. That is why he analyses his possibilities with his lawyers, which include leaving Guatemala. 'We are passive spectators of how a country is falling apart, especially with the Rule of Law and breaking the law', Gálvez warns.

From [Miguel Ángel Gálvez: "Los militares quieren imponer el terror en Guatemala"](#) in El País.