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October 27, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

As members of the House Democracy Partnership (HDP), we write to share our grave concerns regarding the continued efforts to undermine democracy in Guatemala. We strongly support the Guatemalan Supreme Electoral Tribunal's (TSE) certification of the 2023 national elections, including President-elect Bernardo Arévalo. As we quickly approach the expiration of legal protections for political parties on October 31, when the election period concludes, we fear further deterioration in democratic practices and rule of law in Guatemala. As such, we urge the U.S. Administration to prominently support a peaceful transition of power in Guatemala and decry corrupt efforts to overturn the certified results.

In the run up to elections in June of this year, Guatemalan officials engaged in efforts to stifle opposition, such as removing opposition candidates from the ballot and imprisoning a prominent journalist covering the abuses of power. Despite these corrupt attempts to affect the outcome, general elections in June were considered free and fair and resulted in a presidential runoff, in which pro-democracy candidate Bernardo Arévalo of the Movimiento Semilla (Semilla party) prevailed with nearly 60% of the vote.¹ This surprising referendum against the previous ruling party reflects the people's will for political change in Guatemala.

On September 30, 2023, we received reports that the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECDI), an office under the Office of the Attorney General, ordered the seizure of various electoral materials from the TSE.² This was at least the fifth post-election raid directed toward the TSE.³ Specifically, the National Civilian Police seized boxes including vote tallies from the election. We are also deeply troubled by allegations that the National Civilian Police

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/guatemala-0b8d5eb5dbc81fcb6a413f8212739b68>

² <https://www.state.gov/anti-democratic-actions-in-guatemala/>

³ https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-061/23

physically abused the TSE staff during the raid.⁴ We understand the Office of the Attorney General is also pursuing lifting the immunity of staff within the TSE.⁵ This campaign by many in the Guatemalan executive branch to undermine the presidential election results, some parliamentary election results, and the authority of TSE is unacceptable. These attempts to circumvent the electoral certification results, which were independently verified by national and international independent observers, violate Guatemala's electoral laws. Further, legal protections for the President-elect's party end on October 31, when the election period concludes, making this an urgent matter.

Guatemala is the largest nation in Central America, affecting much of the regional, political, and economic landscape and is central to U.S. interests. This independently verified election is the clear will of the people and the outcomes must be respected. As a longtime partner of Guatemala's Congress, the House Democracy Partnership stands firmly for the rule of law and in support of democratic processes in Guatemala. We urgently request the U.S. Administration encourage a peaceful transition of power and work with international partners to prevent further backsliding. Moreover, we ask the U.S. Administration to voice support for the legitimacy of President-elect Arévalo and the Semilla party before the election period ends. HDP fervently hopes Guatemala protects its democracy from attempts to jeopardize the credibility and fairness of the country's electoral processes.

We understand events in the Middle East and Eastern Europe are dominating the world's attention at this time. But we must not turn a blind eye towards critical events so close to our borders. Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter, especially in light of the fast-approaching October 31 deadline.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress
Chairman, House Democracy Partnership



Dina Titus
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, House Democracy Partnership



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress
Member, House Democracy Partnership

⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/guatemala-arevalo-elections-standoff-4950f85160c5354f9610a8282dc22e94>

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/guatemala-attorney-general-determined-block-arevalo-office-sources-2023-10-19/>