

# [Ahead of street protests, UN rights chief urges Guatemalan Government to respect democratic freedoms](#)

With demonstrations expected to take place in various Guatemalan cities on Monday and Tuesday, the [UN human rights chief](#), Michelle Bachelet, is urging the Guatemalan Government to guarantee freedom of expression and opinion, and the right to peaceful assembly and association.

“Freedom of expression, without fear of reprisals and intimidation, is the backbone of democracy,” Ms. Bachelet said. “A culture of human rights and peace is strengthened when diverse social groups can express themselves in the public space and freely exercise their rights.”

The demonstrations have been organized by various civil society groups to highlight several issues, including the [Government’s unilateral decision on 7 January](#) to terminate the work of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a UN anti-corruption body set up 11 years ago in conjunction with the Guatemalan Government. CICIG’s mandate was initially due to run through 3 September this year.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also expressed great concern about the ongoing erosion of various State institutions, including recent attacks on the independence of the Constitutional Court.

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“I would also like to stress that it is essential to guarantee the rule of law, judicial independence and impartiality and respect for democratic institutions, particularly the Constitutional Court, the judiciary, the National Human Rights Institution, the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Electoral Tribunal,” Ms. Bachelet said.

Noting the crucial role played by these institutions in respecting and guaranteeing human rights, the rule of law and democracy, she explained that “the proper exercise of their functions is fundamental in the current context and for the general elections to be held in the coming months”.

She added that “respect for their safety and their physical integrity, as well as that of their families, must be guaranteed by the State of Guatemala in compliance with its international human rights obligations.”

Ms. Bachelet said she and her Guatemala office stand ready to continue to support the State authorities in fulfilling their international human rights obligations and commitments.