

UN anti-corruption body in Guatemala rebuts government's reasons for expulsion order

In a letter addressed to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Iván Velásquez, the senior UN official in charge of the International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG) in Guatemala, has responded to the accusations made by the Government to justify its decision to expel the Commission from the country.

“Since its establishment in 2007, the CICIG has worked resolutely – in accordance with its mandate, accompanying national institutions – for the identification and dismantling of illegal organizations and clandestine security apparatuses, as well as promoting legal and institutional reforms to prevent their reappearance,” wrote Mr. Velásquez.

As a result of its work, the Commission has supported more than one hundred cases before the national courts, identified more than 60 complex criminal structures, obtained more than 300 convictions and promoted more than 34 legal reforms.

Thanking Guterres for consistently supporting the work of the CICIG in strengthening the rule of law and democracy, Mr. Velásquez pointed out that, despite this work, “smear campaigns, defamation and threats have increased” since the presentation of cases involving high-powered political and economic actors. “This is foreseeable with respect to an entity whose purpose is to attack structures that co-opt the State to profit, and refuse to lose privileges obtained illegally and illegitimately,” the letter reads.

Velásquez writes that “the fight against corruption faces opposition in all corners of the planet, but that should not stop global efforts to attack this scourge that prevents the development of countries and democracies.”

A ten page document attached to the letter responds in detail to a dozen accusations made by the government of Jimmy Morales against the CICIG. These include a complaint about the alleged interference of the CICIG in the internal affairs of Guatemala by promoting constitutional reforms in the area of strengthening justice, arguing that “the Agreement establishing the Commission expressly includes in its powers the promotion of legal and institutional reforms that prevent the action and reappearance of illegal bodies and clandestine security apparatuses.”

The accusation that the CICIG abused the use of force in searches carried out in 2016 at the offices of the Secretariat of Administrative Affairs and Security (SAAS) is also referred to in the document: Commissioner Velásquez recalls that “in accordance with Guatemalan law, searches are requested by the Public Prosecutor’s Office and authorized by the competent judge and that

the CICIG, in its technical support role, accompanies certain procedural acts and proceedings that the national authorities carry out, including raids.