

March 12, 2017

Consulado General de Guatemala  
544 Golden Gate Avenue, Suite 100  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
United States

Dear Patricia Eugenia Lavagnino Spinola,

We, Central American students at Cal, repudiate the actions taken by the Guatemalan government that caused the fire at the Hogar Segura Virgen de Asunción that killed over 40 girls. The state of Guatemala failed to protect the lives of dozens of girls and turned their face the other way while these young girls suffered abuse inside a space that was supposed to be safe. We know and understand that the president and Secretary of Social Welfare were complicit in the negligence that led to this great tragedy. This cannot go unpunished.

How is it possible that the government ignored the pleas for help from the people it is supposed to serve? How is it possible that the president preferred to call the PNC to punish the girls for looking for a way out of their bad conditions, instead of sending help, adequate resources and treating them with basic humanity? How is it possible that they let the fire go on for so long after news broke out...so long that it cost the lives of innocent and vulnerable people? How?

In a state that depends on the oppression of anyone who identifies as a woman, we fight for justice in the name of the victims. The girls were not victims of the fire, but rather of a corrupt and useless government and a misogynistic society. This is not the first time that Guatemalan women have suffered at the hands of the government. There is the most recent case of Sepur Zarco, that is evidence of how sexual violence was used as a tool of war against indigenous women by the Guatemalan military during the civil war. Similarly, cases, like the massacre of Dos Erres and the famous 2013 case that found Efraín Ríos Montt guilty of committing genocide, echo the trend of violence against women.

Here in the U.S, Guatemalan women look for refuge after abandoning their homes and homeland to escape domestic violence and the constant threat of gangs. These women do not have another choice but to flee because they know that the police and government that is supposed to protect them, will in fact not. And still, there are thousands of women who keep their stories of injustice and abuse at the hands of patriarchal institutions in Guatemala to themselves. The government promised to protect and develop a quality society for all people in Guatemala. This includes women and the state must accept their complicity in the harm done to the female population. After centuries of abuse and violence, it is time to make the protection and defense of women as well as that of other marginalized communities a priority. Without this, it is impossible to declare the government of Guatemala a democratic, ethical, just and progressive one. In the name of all

the victims, of all the girls who lost their childhood and opportunity to live, we demand the social, political and economic liberation of all women in Guatemala.

We expect, Mr. Console, that you take the necessary steps and communications so that the present administration confront this situation with the utmost seriousness and transparency that the victims and their families deserve. We demand, Mr. Console, that you do not leave this atrocious event unpunished. From the Guatemalan people here in the United States, who are also grieving from the events that took place in the Hogar Seguro, we ask that you take charge and assure us that this case launch a path of justice. The Guatemalan government, your government, owes this and much much more to the families of the 40 or more girls who lost their lives and to all the women, past or present, who suffered at the hands of the state.

Sincerely,  
The Central American Community of UC Berkeley