



## **Brave women break silence and impunity in Guatemala: The Sepur Zarco Case**

The Guatemalan justice system has issued an exemplary ruling in convicting two perpetrators responsible for subjecting Q'eqchi' women to sexual slavery and domestic slavery in the military base located in the Sepur Zarco community in the 1980s. On February 26, the High-Risk Court A sentenced lieutenant coronel Esteelmer Reyes Girón to 120 years in prison for crimes against humanity and murder, and military commissioner Edilberto Valdez Asig to 240 years for crimes against humanity and forced disappearance.

For over six years, fifteen Q'eqchi' women faced a lengthy judicial process, challenging considerable cultural and social obstacles that prevent people from speaking out about sexual violence in Guatemala. For years they endured the stigma and blame of being considered "the army's women" in their community; now they are internationally renowned for their courage and integrity.

For the first time a Guatemalan court has recognized sexual slavery as a crime against humanity and a weapon of war, applying international human rights standards. The sentence orders reparations measures to honor the women through health and housing programs, as well as measures to educate the next generations and the military about the severity of violence against women and respect for human rights.

The organizational signers congratulate the High-Risk Court A and the Public Prosecutor's Office, in particular the Human Rights Prosecuting Unit, as well as the Breaking the Silence and Impunity Alliance – co-plaintiffs in the case – for acting bravely and enforcing the law. We salute the women of Sepur Zarco and hope that the ruling will be restorative for them and for other women who have yet to receive justice for the horrors that they suffered during the internal armed conflict. We hope that in this new period the State guarantees their safety and dignity.

Sexual violence is unacceptable in a democratic society; nevertheless, many women and girls continue to suffer this scourge to this day. The State should assume responsibility for acknowledging the atrocities committed against women and indigenous communities in the past and should enact decisive measures to prevent and penalize sexual violence and domestic slavery in the present.

Guatemala City, Washington D. C., and San José, Costa Rica, March 2, 2016.